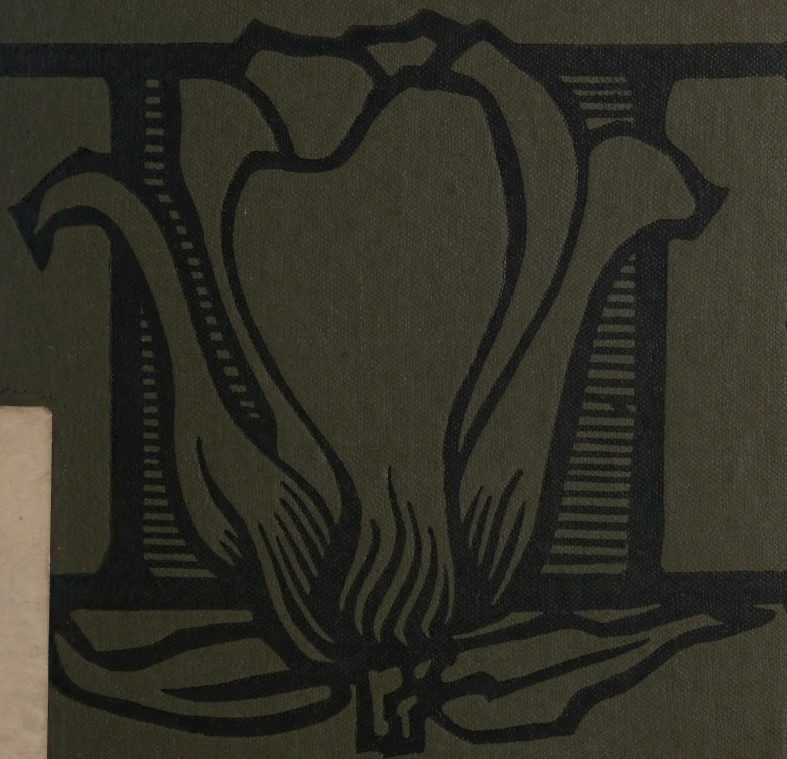


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FORSYTH'S
AUNTS



ELIZA ORNE WHITE

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John Forsyth's Aunts

By Eliza Orne White



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FOURTH IMPRESSION

TO MY SISTER
ROSE WHITE NEAD

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JOHN FORSYTH'S AUNTS

I

JOHN FORSYTH'S AUNTS

“**I** WISH to goodness John would marry again,” said his aunt Deborah, as she began to clear off the breakfast-table. “He needs a wife to keep him in order and look after the twins. Lily,” as a fair-haired little girl appeared at the window, “go and put on your rubbers—there was a heavy dew last night—and tell Jack that he mustn’t go off the place. Those children are enough to try the patience of a saint, and as for their father, it’s the third time he’s been late to breakfast. I am sure Bridget will give warning soon.”

“If you will keep his breakfast warm for him he’ll be late every morning,” said her sister Letitia. “You and Lucy spoil him.”

“It is the matter-of-course way he takes what we do for him that tries my soul,” Miss Deborah continued. “I believe he thinks it is the joy of our lives to have a man upsetting all our ways and two children scattering their playthings like the morning

dew all over our parlor, and I am sure John feels he's doing me a favor every time he brings me a button to sew on. I don't wonder five years of this kind of thing killed John's poor mother; there are three of us and they have only been here a week. Of course I am glad to have them here for the summer, but as for going to New York to keep house for him next winter, I won't!"

"I am sure I won't," said Miss Letitia; "and Lucy doesn't know any more about house-keeping than a child of ten. The only way out of the difficulty is for him to marry some attractive woman like Laura Macauley."

"Laura Macauley!" cried Miss Deborah. "She isn't in the least domestic. She wastes too much time under her sketching umbrella. Frances Simonds would make him a far better wife; she's the salt of the earth."

"The salt of the earth often crystallizes in ugly shapes," returned Miss Letitia. "I grant that Frances has all the virtues, but, like all men, John is sure to have his fancy taken by a beautiful face."

"I should fall in love with Esther Norris, if I were a man," said Lucy, the youngest sister. "She is so pretty and fascinating, and she would be devoted to the twins."

"She is a mere child; she isn't more than eighteen. Lucy, I am surprised at you," and Miss Deb-

orah seized her sister's cup and saucer and plunged them into the dish-tub.

"Deborah," remonstrated Lucy mildly, "I wanted another cup of coffee."

"Never mind, child. One is as much as is good for you. I have a brilliant idea," she added presently; "I'll ask Frances here to-night, to help eat your birthday cake, Lucy; that will give John a chance to meet her in a natural, informal way."

"Deborah!" expostulated Miss Letitia. "It would look so pointed to ask one girl alone. Why not ask Laura too? Lucy would like that much better."

"If you really want to please me, you'll invite Esther Norris," said Lucy. "You know I never can get on with Laura Macauley, and after all it is my birthday party, not John's."

"Oh, well, have Esther too, if you want, dear," said Miss Deborah, kindly; "she'll help amuse the twins. Of course we must not give John the least hint of our plans," she added.

At this point John sauntered into the room and walked up to his aunt Lucy.

"I've been told that somebody has a birthday," he remarked, as he slipped a little package into her hand. "Is it twenty-five you are this time?"

"Oh, John, how I wish it were!"

Miss Lucy had the golden hair and slender figure

that suggest youth, and they made her faded complexion seem like an anachronism. She looked like a young girl who had gone to sleep and waked to find herself a middle-aged woman. Her older sisters had dark eyes and brown hair that was thickly streaked with gray. There was a strong family resemblance between them, but Miss Letitia, who was the handsomer of the two and much the taller, had a stately air, as if she felt that no lot was superior to her own, while Miss Deborah never seemed to think about herself:

“I’m sorry to be late to breakfast again,” said John. “It is awfully good of you not to scold me.”

“I hope your steak isn’t done too much,” said Miss Deborah, somewhat disarmed by his genial manner. “By the way, John,” she added casually, “you mustn’t make any engagement for to-night, for your aunt Lucy will be so disappointed if you are not here to eat her birthday cake.”

“All right, I’ll be sure to be on hand.”

When her nephew came into the house that afternoon so late that his escape seemed impossible, Miss Letitia began diplomatically:

“John, we felt that your aunt Lucy needed a little diversion on her birthday, and so we have asked some ladies to tea to-night.”

“Ladies! Then I shan’t stay; why didn’t you tell me before?”

"There are only three of them," Miss Deborah hastened to add, "and they are such nice girls."

"Girls! Worse and worse! Ladies are bad enough, but I'll be hanged if I ever know what to say to a parcel of girls. I'll go and take tea with Ned Simonds."

"His sister Frances is to be here to-night," said Miss Deborah. "You need not be afraid of her, she is so shy. It will be too rude of you to go off, especially as Frances is coming in at the gate now."

"I can go out the back way," he suggested, but Miss Lucy caught his hand as he passed her. "You wouldn't desert your old aunt on her birthday I am sure, dear," she said, and John, who was very fond of his aunt Lucy, yielded. His magnanimity was not sufficient, however, to cause him to be polite to her guest.

Frances Simonds looked as if, to be in complete harmony with the general scheme of nature, she ought to have been a middle-aged woman instead of a girl of twenty, for there was little in her grave exterior to suggest youth; but, although she was plain, her face was not uninteresting, and she gave the impression of having a great deal to say, if only she could find the courage to say it.

"I have often heard my brother speak of you, Mr. Forsyth," she began in a low voice.

"Yes? I met him on the street to-day; he is looking very well."

"He is very well—he is always well—except," she continued with nervous conscientiousness, "that he had typhoid fever last autumn and almost died."

This was such a preposterous ending to her sentence that she wanted to laugh, but felt too keenly mortified.

There was a pause, and then Frances began again, "It is a very pleasant day."

"Do you think so? I prefer summer weather in June."

This was the extent of their conversation for the evening. Frances was too much crushed to attempt to renew it.

Happily a diversion was soon caused by the arrival of Miss Macauley. She was a handsome woman of thirty, with a fine figure, and a quantity of fair hair elaborately dressed. Her lilac-and-white foulard silk had the perfection of detail that one associates with a fashion-plate. In spite of himself, John was soon launched in a conversation with her, or to speak more accurately, he listened, and replied occasionally in monosyllables. She touched with easy confidence upon politics, literature and art, and her talk was as conventional as her gown. She was like a hundred other well-bred women whom John had

met, and although they were never stimulating, they always set him at his ease. A little later the arrival of Esther Norris made a breezy interruption.

"How kind of you to remember my birthday, dear child," said Miss Lucy, as the young girl gave her a bunch of blush roses. "I love these roses better than any flowers in the world, but you must keep some of them, dearest," and she fastened two into Esther's bodice. "They just match your pink ribbons, although they are not so bright as your cheeks."

"I had no idea I was so late," said Esther, catching a look of disapproval on Miss Deborah's face, and glancing hastily at the clock. "I stopped to make friends with the twins."

"I am depending upon seeing the twins," said Miss Macauley. "I am very fond of children. Here they are at the window, now. Do come in, dears, and see me."

"Children, what have you been doing?" cried Miss Deborah, as the two promptly accepted this invitation, unabashed by their disheveled appearance.

"Watering the rose-bushes," Jack replied.

"Watering the rose-bushes! Watering yourselves I should say. Who would believe I dressed you in clean clothes half an hour ago? Don't you remember I told you never to touch the hose?"

"We've had a fine time rolling down the bank,"

said Jack, wisely ignoring this question. "Did you ever roll down a bank?" he asked Miss Macauley in engaging tones, as she begged a kiss from him.

"No, I can't say I ever did."

"I have," said Esther. "Ever so many times. It's great fun."

"I say, Aunt Deborah," Jack added, emboldened by the interest these young ladies were taking in him, "can't Lily and I come in to tea?"

"No, you can't."

"We'll be very good. Please, please let us. There's going to be lobster salad, and strawberries, and pine-apple ice-cream," he confided to Miss Macauley, "and Aunt Lucy's birthday cake, with walnuts in it and a frosting. She isn't going to have any candles because she's so old it would make too many. Lily and I don't think a birthday cake is any fun without candles, and we are going to have candles if we live to be a hundred. We are seven now," he stated, as he took Miss Macauley's lilac ribbons in his grimy little hands. "How old are you?"

"Children," said Miss Deborah, "you can go now. You talk altogether too much."

After their guests' departure, as Miss Deborah was putting out the two extra gas-burners that had been lighted in their honor, she took John to task for not talking enough.

"You were all chattering so fast that you did not

give me any chance," he returned, "and I felt as if my son had talked enough to keep up the credit of the family."

"We have overdone matters in our desire to leave everything to time and John," said Miss Letitia, a month later. "It is evident that he hasn't the faintest idea of devoting himself seriously to any girl, and yet he goes sketching with Laura so often that Mrs. Simonds asked me to-day if it were true that he was engaged to her. How I wish it were! He likes her immensely. I am so glad I started that reading-club! He told me he had never heard any woman read aloud so well."

"He has grown very fond of Frances," Miss Deborah affirmed. "He said to me the other day that she was the kind of woman in whom he had entire confidence, and he thought it was so kind of her to help me make those little gowns and aprons for Lily."

"He told me that Esther was the prettiest girl he had ever seen," said Lucy, "and the twins are so fond of her."

"They are all nice girls," Miss Letitia admitted, "but I can't help feeling that Laura is especially well suited to him. Although I shrink from it, I am sure it is my duty to give him a hint on the subject."

"If you are going to speak to him I certainly shall," Miss Deborah announced, "for you will say

everything you can to prejudice him in favor of Laura."

When John went into the library that afternoon to write some letters he found his aunt Letitia there, occupied as usual with a book.

"John," she began affably, "I was just wondering if I could not persuade you to make some calls with me."

"I am afraid you can't. Making calls is not in my line. I always say the wrong thing."

"You never do yourself justice; only yesterday, someone—who was it? oh, yes, Laura Macauley—said you were so interesting. She finds us very quiet here, she is in New York so much in the winter. She is a girl calculated to shine in the best society. Don't you think so?"

"Yes."

This admission encouraged Miss Letitia to proceed, and she led up to the desired point by such gradual approaches that her nephew had not the faintest idea what was coming. She ended by saying that if she wanted a companion she should choose Laura Macauley.

"Yes?" he said, politely.

"John, you are very stupid. I shall have to tell you in plain language that you are reported to be engaged to her, and that nothing would make me happier—

"I, engaged to her!"

"But, John, you always have more to say to her than to any other girl, and you were so delighted with the way she read *Barrie*. I thought you liked her."

John laughed in spite of his vexation.

"I like her well enough, but you can hardly expect me to marry a woman because she reads *Barrie* well and is an inveterate talker. I hope Miss Macauley won't get wind of this ridiculous rumor, for it would annoy her exceedingly," and he stalked out of the room and took refuge in the parlor, where his aunt Lucy was lying on the sofa.

"What is the matter, dear?" she asked. "You look vexed."

"I am vexed. What fools women are! It seems that some idiot has started the report of my engagement to Miss Macauley!"

"How absurd!" his aunt exclaimed sympathetically, "of course you could never fancy her." She paused, and then went on nervously, "but I must say, dear, that I wish you could love some——"

"Aunt Lucy," he broke in, "I thought you knew me too well to imagine that I could ever care enough for any woman to marry again."

"I know how devotedly you loved Emily, but I am sure it would be much better for your children, and that you would be far happier yourself, if you

had a companion, a charming woman, to share your life."

"I have been thinking so too, dear Aunt Lucy, and I hope to persuade you to come and brighten up our home for us when we go back to New York."

"I am too old and too dull a woman, John dear. You are so alone, now your mother has gone, and you are still so young—you need the influence of some bright——"

"Aunt Lucy, I shall never marry again. I tell you so once for all. And unless you promise to come to New York with me this autumn I shall commit suicide. Will you promise?"

"I suppose I shall have to promise," she said with a faint laugh.

John thought it best to make his escape at this juncture, and it occurred to him that the house of his friend, Ned Simonds, would be a pleasant refuge. Even the most inveterate of gossips could not report his engagement to Frances. John met his aunt Deborah as he was going out of the door.

"I have been wanting a chance all day to have a little talk with you," she said. "Where are you going now?"

"To take tea with Ned Simonds."

"I'll walk part way with you. I am always glad to have you go there. Frances is such a nice girl, with no nonsense about her."

John assented heartily.

"John, we all think you ought to marry again," Miss Deborah began with her usual bluntness. "Don't be influenced by what Letitia and Lucy say. I am sure you will agree with me in thinking that Frances Simonds will make you a good, practical wife."

"Good heavens! Aunt Deborah! You all speak as if I had only to offer myself to any woman to be accepted. I am not the kind of man to make an impression on a young girl."

"I know that, but Frances isn't like most girls. She would not mind your blunt ways."

"Indeed," said John shortly, not over-well pleased to have his opinion of himself corroborated.

"Frances would be devoted to Lily and Jack," Miss Deborah continued, "and she is very bright although she is so shy. She has learned a great deal about illness from her father, in fact her mother says she means to be a trained nurse when she is old enough, but a happy marriage——"

"Aunt Deborah, you will drive me crazy between you. You have spoiled all my pleasure here. I shall go away to-morrow, and I sha'n't come back until it is time to take the children home in the autumn, unless you promise not to say one word more to me on the subject, and to tell every man, woman and child in Eppingham that you know, for a positive fact,

I shall never be engaged to anybody! By the way, Aunt Lucy has agreed to keep house for me next winter."

"Lucy? That is preposterous! She is much too delicate, and she does not know anything about house-keeping."

"She knows quite enough to satisfy me."

The next morning John went to Mt. Desert, where he stayed until he was summoned home by the following telegram:

"Jack broke leg falling from hay-cart. Improving. Wants you."

It was a cold August evening when John arrived, and after giving his aunts a hasty greeting he rushed up to the nursery, pausing before the open door, for he heard an unfamiliar voice.

A wood-fire was crackling on the hearth, throwing its flickering light on Jack's subdued face, as he lay in bed, and on Lily, who was sitting on the hearth-rug with her arms around Esther Norris. John had never seen a more charming contrast than his fair-haired little daughter and Esther with her brilliant coloring and dark hair and eyes. She was telling the children a fairy tale, and it was of absorbing interest, judging by the expression of breathless attention on their faces.

"Why, there's father," Jack called out.

"Good-evening, Mr. Forsyth," said Esther, rising hastily. "I am glad to see you back again. I must go now, children."

"Oh, please, please stay and finish the story," Jack entreated, "or we shall wish father hadn't come home."

"We are glad he has come," said Lily with the tact of her sex, as she gave her father one of her tempestuous hugs. "But we do want the rest of the story. Father would like it so much too. It is about a little boy and a little girl, father, who were turned into statues by a hateful old witch, and just as you came in a prince was coming along, and we are crazy to know what happened next."

"Do tell us what happened next, Miss Norris. I shall be very sorry if I drive you away."

"I must go, for it is getting late."

John had a momentary pang, for the three had looked so happy before they had caught sight of him, and now a slight frost seemed to have touched them all.

"Won't you let father come to the tea-party tomorrow?" Lily begged, as Esther kissed her good-night.

"It is to be strictly a children's party, with only you and Jack, and your aunt Lucy and me. I am afraid your father is too old."

"I am not so old as aunt Lucy."

"You are a great deal older as we count age."

"I will be so good. I am a much better example to youth than aunt Lucy is."

"That is just the trouble. You will behave altogether too well. If we let you come will you promise to tell us stories, and cut out paper soldiers for us, and drink lemonade out of a doll's tumbler?"

"I will promise anything, if you will only let me come."

This was the beginning of a series of enchanted days, that made John feel as if he had gone back to the time when he was a happy, improvident boy. Esther's eighteen years put such a barrier of youth between them that he enjoyed being with her as frankly and simply as if she were one of his children, while on her side the eager girl, who longed to see the world, felt the charm of the older man, who had had a varied experience in many lands.

When Jack was well enough to go out of doors once more, his convalescence was celebrated by drives, picnics, and rows on the river that wound lazily in and out under overhanging boughs. It did not matter to John where they went, or how many others shared Esther, if only she gave the party the life and charm of her presence.

At last the time came when John had to set the day for going home. His aunt Lucy had not ob-

tained without a struggle the consent of her sisters to keep house for him, but John had a peremptory way of settling things, and had overruled all their objections by remarking that he wanted his aunt Lucy, and he intended to have her ; that was the long and the short of the matter. Her own feelings were mixed. She dreaded the responsibility, she who had hitherto been shielded from every care, and yet she exulted in the prospect of having a chance at last to lead her own life. And it made her happy to think that John wanted her.

The children were very unhappy at the idea of parting from Esther, and Jack suggested that perhaps she would go back with them to be their governess.

"My dear child, it would never do. She does not know enough to teach," said Miss Letitia, whose standard was high.

"Oh, I guess she'd know enough to teach us," Jack remarked. "She's got to do something now her father has lost his money. She told us so."

"And they are going to move into a smaller house," said Lily. "I don't believe there would be room for her at home."

"She is altogether too young," said Miss Deborah.

Their aunt Lucy thought it a delightful plan, and so did their father, and when he approved a

plan it was apt to be carried out at once. He and the twins went over to the Norrises in fine spirits, that very afternoon, to see Esther.

She was alone in the old-fashioned parlor, which was a melancholy travesty of its former self, for the carpet was up, and a packing-box half-full of books was standing on the floor.

"Good-afternoon," she said. "I can't shake hands with you. Mine are so dusty. It is a judgment on me for not taking better care of the books when they were on the shelves."

"Miss Esther, you don't know how sorry I was to hear of your father's losses," John began, "but I am hoping that a great happiness may come to me and my children in consequence. I have come to ask if you will not be their governess, and go back with them and aunt Lucy and me next week."

Esther was silent, and he proceeded to unfold his plan at greater length. It was so advantageous to her that he had not once thought of her refusal.

When he stopped speaking she said, "You are very kind, Mr. Forsyth, but I cannot possibly take the position."

"Why Miss Esther," protested Jack, "you told us you hated to think you might not see us again for ever so long, and you said you thought it would be horrid to travel with that old lady who wants you to go to California."

"I know, but I have almost made up my mind to go with her."

"And you seriously mean that you would prefer this to teaching children who are devotedly attached to you?" John asked.

"Yes, I mean it."

She had paused before she answered. Her back was turned towards John, as she stooped to put a book into the packing-box.

"It is very rude of me, I know, to go on with my work," she observed.

"I wish you would stop just a minute and sit here quietly where I can look into your face. Miss Esther, you must come with us. We can't any of us get on without you."

Her unexpected opposition only made him the more eager to carry out his purpose.

"I am not used to having my wishes thwarted," he added.

"I am afraid you will have to try that discipline for once."

"Give me one good reason and I will be satisfied. Or rather I will prove it is no reason. You are very fond of Aunt Lucy and the children, so the trouble must be with me. You think I haven't a good temper, and that is true, but I do not know why you should fear it, for I could not be angry with you. I suppose you feel that it would be too quiet for you

in a house where there are only older people and children, but we would give you a great deal of freedom."

"Please do not urge me," she entreated. "I know I am doing right."

"I wish I knew what your morbid scruple was. I believe it is some quirk of your New England conscience. Come, tell me, isn't it?"

"I don't think so. I would rather travel," she asserted hastily.

"You would rather travel. You shall travel all you like. I am thinking of taking Aunt Lucy and the children abroad next summer," he said, boldly, improvising this scheme on the spur of the moment.

"Please do not say any more about it," Esther begged. "I have made up my mind not to go to you, and I shall not change."

"Very well, as you like," John returned coldly.

He had never felt such bitter disappointment, or so humiliating a sense of impotence.

"Oh, Miss Esther," said Lily, "it will be terrible to say good-by to you; it will be worse than parting from the Simonds' yellow kitten."

A few minutes after their departure Miss Lucy softly entered the Norrises' parlor to see if she could not make Esther change her purpose. Esther was sitting on the floor with one arm resting on the packing-box, and her face buried in her hands.

1

"My dear child, what is the matter?" Miss Lucy asked.

"Nothing—of any consequence," she answered with a little sob. "I was feeling blue at the idea of leaving home, that is all."

"My dear, as you have to leave home, why can't you go to New York with us?"

Esther turned her head away quickly, but Miss Lucy saw the tell-tale color mounting into her face. Then she knew the reason, and Esther knew that she knew it, but they both pretended that they did not know.

Miss Lucy went up to the girl and drew her towards her, kissing her gently. "Dear," she said, "of course it would be dull for you to be with us."

"You will tell Mr. Forsyth that you think it would be dull for me?" Esther begged with a little break in her voice.

"Yes, dear, I will tell him. He is a great deal older than you are," she added, as she kissed Esther again, "and yet I used to hope—but he is one of those rare men who, having loved once, never can love again."

"Well, Aunt Lucy," said John, as he looked up from a book he had been making a pretence of reading, "what success did you have?"

"None, John, but I see her point of view now, and I think she is right. She is a young girl, and she needs young society, and then—this is my point of view, not hers—she ought to be where she has a chance to meet men who might fall in love with her."

"Men who might fall in love with her!" cried John. The mere idea filled him with torturing jealousy.

"Yes, I used to hope you might," Miss Lucy confessed, "but when you told me how impossible it was for you ever to care for any woman——"

"Aunt Lucy," said John, breathlessly, "do you mean you think it possible—that—that she could care for me?"

"How can I tell, dear? I should say you were a great deal too quiet to suit her, but one never knows what is going on in a girl's mind. There is about as much probability that she refused to go back with you because she was afraid she might grow to like you too well, as because she was afraid of not liking you well enough."

Some days later Lucy Wyatt had the satisfaction of announcing to her sisters John's engagement to Esther Norris.

"I am simply electrified by this news," Miss Deborah exclaimed. "That is all the reliance that can be placed on your solemn statement, Lucy, that John

could never care enough for any woman to marry again."

"Well, don't annihilate me, dear; I was only repeating what he said."

"Since he has the capacity for caring, I wish to goodness he had fallen in love with a sensible girl like Frances Simonds, she would have made him a far better wife; but men are all alike, they prefer a pretty face to all the virtues."

"That is just what I told you in the beginning," said Miss Letitia.

THE CONVERSION OF MISS
DEBORAH

II

THE CONVERSION OF MISS DEBORAH

EVERY one in Eppingham was astonished when the Wyatts set up a pet kitten, but no one was half so much surprised as they were themselves. Miss Letitia and Miss Deborah, who had always scorned other people's pets, had never intended to have a cat, but as is the case sometimes with greatness, it had been thrust upon them. Miss Lucy, on the contrary, had always longed for one, but she was so much younger than her sisters, that her wishes were not considered of any importance.

The kitten's acquaintance had first been made by Miss Lucy. It was on an afternoon in May, when Lucy, sustained by the consciousness of a new spring suit, had gone out to make some calls. She went into the library first, to show herself to her sisters.

"Turn around," Miss Letitia commanded. "Your jacket is too long under the arms," she an-

nounced. "It wrinkles, and will have to be shortened."

"It doesn't look badly, child," Miss Deborah hastened to assure her. "Letitia would see wrinkles under an angel's wings."

"Your hat is very becoming," Miss Letitia commented graciously. "I am glad you took my advice and decided on violets."

"I wish you had chosen pink roses," said Miss Deborah. "Violets look so old for you, dear, especially with that gray suit. A woman can wear violets and gray gowns at any age."

"I suspect I am 'any age,'" Lucy said, as she stood before the old-fashioned mirror pinning on her veil.

"Nonsense, child!" and Miss Deborah, who was fourteen years older than Lucy, gave an admiring glance at her sister's slight figure and golden hair. "With that spotted veil on you don't look more than twenty-five, does she, Letitia?"

"Thirty-five," said Miss Letitia.

As Lucy was a little over forty, she felt grateful, even for this amendment.

"Have you got your card-case?" asked Miss Deborah.

"Yes, dear."

"Be sure you go to see Laura Macauley," her sister Letitia admonished her. "It is three months

since she asked us to tea, and you have not made your party-call."

As Lucy stepped out into the fragrant sunshine she had that unreasoning thrill and illogical certainty of coming happiness that the spring-time used to bring her in her girlhood. Then, with a sharp little pang, she remembered that there was nothing very interesting that could happen to her any more. As she passed down the brick walk between the two huge lilac bushes full of their purple, half-opened buds, she lingered a moment to pick a spray in memory of old times. The world was beautiful on that May afternoon, with that subtle hint of greater beauty yet to come, which is the joy of youth and early spring.

"Nothing is ever so beautiful as it promises to be," she thought, as she looked at the shimmer of green on the maples. "For that reason, if for no other, there is nothing so lovely in all nature as May."

The spray of lilacs called up a host of memories of earlier days, and she felt very lonely as she went down the village street. It was a deep-seated loneliness, which the making of a number of calls did little to dispel. She left the most formidable until the last.

"I do hope Laura won't be in," Lucy thought, as she rang the Macauleys' bell, and then she reflected

that it was absurd for her to be afraid of a girl who was at least ten years younger than she was.

A trim maid opened the door and looked at Lucy and her new gray suit with supercilious superiority.

Miss Macauley was at home, and Lucy walked into the irreproachable parlor with the feeling of miserable anticipation that we associate with the dentist's office. It was an immaculate room, with a polished hard-wood floor, almost covered by an oriental rug, and a dark-red wall-paper sprinkled over with engravings in black frames. Lucy looked in vain for a single sign of reassuring shabbiness. Presently, as if to make her feel more at home, there came in at the partly open door the most lovable gray kitten that she had ever seen. Nothing could have been more at variance with the surrounding stiffness than this little creature with his unconscious grace and confiding certainty of a welcome.

"Oh, you beauty, you dear," Lucy said. "Come and see your old auntie."

The kitten promptly accepted this invitation and jumped into his new friend's lap.

"Good-afternoon, I am so glad to see you," and Miss Macauley, in an elaborate pale-green gown, swept into the room, extending her hand with her

stereotyped smile and conventionally cordial manner, which did not deceive her visitor.

"Pussy, naughty pussy," she said, "get down out of Miss Wyatt's lap; you will tumble her pretty new frock."

Instead of obeying, the kitten nestled down comfortably, making a charming harmony of color, a dark-gray fluffy ball, against the lighter gray of Lucy's dress.

"Dear pussy," she said, stroking him gently.

"You are evidently very fond of cats."

"I adore them."

"I want to find a good home for this one. We have two others, both promised, but you can have this little fellow if you want him."

"I should love to have him, but I can't, for Letitia and Deborah are both prejudiced against cats. He is the most enchanting kitten I ever saw. What is his name?"

"He hasn't any. We have such a succession of them that I can't name them all."

Then Lucy knew that Laura Macauley was not really fond of cats. It seemed hard that such a person should have a succession of kittens, while she, who loved them so, did not own even one.

Miss Macauley talked on general subjects for a few minutes with such an ease of manner and flow

of language that her visitor felt like an ill-informed child. At last Lucy rose to go.

"You dear thing, I must put you down," and she gave the fluffy head a regretful kiss.

"He does not want to leave you," said Miss Macauley, who had been in despair as to finding a home for this kitten, and now saw the chance of her life. "I really must give him to you. Wait a minute," she added, with the decision of a general to a private, "I will get a basket and you can take him home with you now."

"Oh," gasped Lucy, "I can't. What would Letitia and Deborah say?"

Miss Macauley had already left the room. Lucy stood transfixed. The kitten was on her shoulder now; his warm little face was nestling against her cheek.

"What blue eyes you have, dear," she said; "so full of expression. It seems as if I must have you, but I can't. And yet it would not be polite to steal out of the house like a thief before Laura comes back."

"Here is a basket, just the right size," said Miss Macauley as she came back. "He won't get out," and she put the kitten in and shut down the cover. "Take him; I am glad to give him to you," and there was no ring of insincerity in her voice now.

Lucy's fingers closed on the handle of the basket

in a faltering way. "You are very kind, Laura; I appreciate your generosity, but I mustn't take him," and she put her gift reluctantly down on the sofa. "Dear, it breaks my heart to give you up, but Letitia and Deborah——"

"It is only fair that you should have your way sometimes," Miss Macauley broke in. "If you want a kitten there is no reason why you should not have one. Miss Letitia is so fond of me she will be satisfied when she finds I have given him to you, and Miss Deborah will be glad to have you pleased."

"If my sisters do not object, I will come for him to-morrow morning."

"Take him home with you now," Laura commanded, realizing that there was no time like the present. "If you mind carrying the basket, I will walk back with you and take it myself."

"I don't mind that in the least," said Lucy in a flurried way. "I should be very sorry to give you so much trouble."

Miss Macauley once more thrust the basket into Lucy's hand, and followed her to the door. "Good-by," she said. "I am sure you will enjoy the kitten," and she walked into the house with the exhilarating sense of a victory won.

Lucy had not gone far before she met Mrs. Lutterworth, the minister's wife. Mrs. Lutterworth was one of those persons who feel that they are born

into this world to set other people right, and there is always a wide field for this in a parish.

Another trait of hers was curiosity. She was eager to know what Lucy Wyatt had in that covered basket. It seemed so incongruous, taken in connection with her best gown and those spotless gloves.

"You have evidently had a present," she hazarded. "Won't you let me carry that heavy basket for you? You look tired."

"No, thank you; it isn't heavy."

"I am going to play a game of twenty questions. Is it animal, mineral, or vegetable?"

Before Lucy could reply, a round head answered this question by pushing up the cover of the basket, while a pair of blue eyes looked at Mrs. Lutterworth in mild astonishment.

"Lucy Wyatt! What on earth are you doing with that kitten?"

"Laura Macauley *would* give him to me."

"That is just like Laura to foist off one of her kittens on you. Lucy, you should have more spirit."

"I am very fond of kittens. I am only wondering what Deborah and Letitia will say."

"Well, you are likely to find out pretty soon."

"I couldn't help taking it without seeming very rude."

"You should have the courage to say 'no,' and by the way, my dear, Mr. Lutterworth is determined that you shall take Esther Norris's Sunday School class; Bertha Hall has made a complete fiasco of it."

"I think I have the courage to say 'no,'" said Lucy, with a little smile.

"That is an entirely different matter. Ministers and kittens are not in the same category," returned Mrs. Lutterworth with a smile. "Mr. Lutterworth will not take no for an answer. He expects you at the vestry at half-past nine next Sunday. Lucy, if you don't want that kitten, just open the basket and let him out now. He is pretty enough to find a good home, and the chances are he would run straight to Laura Macauley, which would serve her right."

Lucy put the kitten's head gently back. "I've got him, and I am going to keep him," she said.

Her sisters were both out when Lucy reached home. She took the kitten into the kitchen and showed him to the cook, who had a heart for cats. "Did you ever see such a pretty creature?" she asked.

"He is a beauty, Miss Lucy. But what will Miss Deborah say? Her that is so afraid of their catching birds."

"I am going to keep him in the attic next my

room to-night. I don't dare tell my sisters, for fear they will send him back. I brought him out for you to give him his supper."

"Bless his dear heart!"

Lucy and Bridget established the kitten in the room on the third story that used to belong to Mary Wyatt, more than thirty years ago, before she married Amos Forsyth. It had been turned into a store-room now, and was filled with trunks, barrels of old letters, unsteady tables and highly colored chromos. These inartistic, but appealing pictures, had been sent into banishment by the decree of Miss Letitia, to the regret of Miss Deborah and Lucy, who were weak enough to love them from old association.

Lucy had always preferred to keep her own old room in the third story. Her sisters wondered why she still climbed those winding stairs, when she could have her choice of three good chambers on the second floor, which was sadly empty now, but no other room held the associations of her girlhood, and no other windows commanded so friendly and intimate a view of the tree-tops. It was a spotless room, with a white Marseilles quilt on the bed, white dimity curtains and a white frill on the washstand. The furniture was chestnut, and had been made to order for her, and given her by her father, on her eighteenth birthday. Lilies were carved on the low

dressing-table and on the bed. Lucy had always reminded her father of a lily. In the chestnut book-case were all the volumes she had loved in her childhood, the Lucy books, the Prudy books, Little Susy's Six Birthdays, and, best of all, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, and Through the Looking-glass. The last two had not been classics in her childhood, but new books, about which there had been a division of opinion. Her grown-up sisters had thought them too far-fetched.

"You dear thing," said Lucy, as she gave the kitten a hug, "I hope you will be happy in the attic. You are next door to me."

"Where on earth is that cat?" Miss Deborah asked, later in the evening.

"I am sure I don't know," replied Miss Letitia.

Lucy bent her head guiltily over her embroidery.

"It sounds as if it were in this house, but of course it can't be," said Miss Deborah.

"It is probably in the back yard," Miss Letitia observed. "People are so selfish where their cats are concerned. They never have the least consideration for their neighbors."

Lucy stole upstairs and opened the door. Suddenly the piteous mews ceased, a soft head rubbed against her, and a little voice gave a series of happy purrs. Lucy passed an hour in her own room. She

did not dare to stay any longer for fear of arousing the suspicions of her sisters.

"Well, of all unsociable persons, you are the most so," said Miss Letitia, when her sister came downstairs at last. "What have you been about?"

"I had letters to write," said Lucy. This was true enough, and she did not think it necessary to add that she had not written them.

In the middle of the night those tell-tale mews began again. Fortunately Lucy's sisters were good sleepers, but nevertheless she was in constant dread of their waking. At last she rose and opened the attic door. A little furry being rubbed against her bare feet in an ecstasy of joy. She stooped and caught the kitten up in her arms.

"You shall spend the night with me, you dear, fascinating, homesick little thing."

This was not so peaceful a proceeding as Lucy had pictured, for the kitten proved to be of a wakeful disposition. He ran up and down over the bed, and every now and then would amuse himself by sharpening his claws on her arms.

"What shall I do with you, you little mischief? We are not either of us going to get a wink of sleep. I wonder if you are not hungry?"

Lucy went into the attic to get the pitcher of milk and the saucer that she had left there. She did not light the candle, for she knew just where she

had put the pitcher, on the left-hand side of the mantel-piece. She reached out her hand for it and stumbled over a picture that leaned insecurely against a small table. Picture and table both fell to the floor with a deafening crash. Lucy fled guiltily into her own room and thrust the kitten under the bedclothes awaiting developments. They came presently in the shape of Miss Deborah, who ran panting up the winding stairs.

"Lucy! What on earth was that noise? Are you ill, child?"

"I'm all right, dear," said Lucy, feigning a sleepy voice.

"Then there must be burglars in the house. Did you hear that fearful noise?"

"Yes. I knocked something over."

"You knocked something over. What did you knock over, you crazy child? Is it broken?"

"It is all right. Please go downstairs, dear, and don't bother about me," she begged, for the kitten was making frantic attempts to get his head above the bedclothes.

"But I must know what fell," insisted Miss Deborah, coming into Lucy's room. "Everything looks all right. This is very mysterious. Are you sure there is not someone in the house?"

"Perfectly sure. I tell you everything is all right. Good-night, dear."

It was at this moment that the kitten, enraged at being kept so long under the bedclothes, dug his claws into Lucy's arms and uttered a piercing "miau."

"Lucy Wyatt," said Miss Deborah, the truth flashing upon her, "have you got a kitten here in this room?"

"Yes."

"Where did you get it? And how long have you had it?"

"Since five o'clock this afternoon. I was going to tell you to-morrow. Laura Macauley insisted upon giving him to me. I told her you wouldn't like it."

"Like it! Well, I should think not. To-morrow morning you can have the pleasure of taking the kitten back to Laura Macauley with my best compliments."

By way of answer Lucy caught up her pet and kissed him passionately. Her long golden hair fell around her worn and faded face as she held the little creature up in mute supplication.

"I simply cannot give him back, he is so sweet," she said.

Miss Deborah was touched. She had never been able to realize that Lucy was a middle-aged woman. And to-night, with her flowing hair, and the kitten pressed close to her face, she seemed more than ever

like the little sister of the past, whom Miss Deborah had felt it her duty to scold and train, but whom, notwithstanding, she loved better than anyone in the world.

"If only kittens wouldn't grow into cats," Miss Deborah said, meditatively. "Lucy, I would do anything in the world for you, if my principles were not involved, but when he is a little older he will catch birds. Now, I hold that birds have a far more important place in the economy of nature than cats."

"He won't be big enough to catch anything this summer," said Lucy, eagerly.

"Then I am sure Letitia will seriously object. She has always been firmly set against cats."

"She has had her way for a great many years."

"Then there are the Browns' and Simonds's chickens. It would be a very unneighborly thing for us to have a cat who might eat chickens."

"He won't eat them; I'll train him."

"You train anything, child? All the training he got would have to come from me. No, Lucy, I am very sorry to disappoint you, but he must go back to Laura to-morrow morning. It will be easier for you in the end."

"I can't take him back," said Lucy, in pathetic tones. "I was feeling so lonely this afternoon, thinking about old times, and when that dear little

thing cuddled down in my lap and Laura gave him to me, it seemed like a special providence. I have had to give up one thing after another all my life," she added, with a little break in her voice.

There was a moment of silence. Both women were thinking of days long ago, when those empty rooms were peopled with laughing inmates.

Miss Deborah brushed her hand hastily across her eyes.

"Well, Lucy Wyatt," she said, "if a kitten can be any comfort to you, for heaven's sake keep him. I'll make it all right with Letitia."

"Bridget," said Miss Deborah the next morning, "you can bring in a plate for Mr. Gray. He is going to take breakfast with us."

"Mr. Gray!" gasped Miss Letitia. "Who is he? And why didn't you tell me before?"

"He has been staying at the Macauley's. He is a great friend of Laura's."

"Then he is sure to be agreeable. I wish you had told me, though, and I would have put on my white morning-gown."

Miss Deborah gave what would have been called a chuckle had the sound issued from the lips of a schoolboy. And just then Bridget came in with the kitten tucked under one arm and a plate in the other hand.

"My sister, Miss Wyatt, Mr. Gray," said Miss Deborah, formally.

"Deborah, what tomfoolery is this?" demanded Miss Letitia, drawing herself up with dignity.

"It is a kitten your friend, Laura Macauley, gave to Lucy. Poor child, she was afraid to tell us last night. I know we never meant to have a kitten, but Lucy seems to have grown very much attached to it already."

Mr. Gray looked about him for a minute; then he gave a spring and nestled down confidently in Miss Letitia's lap. Lucy had not come down yet. She was making up for her wakeful night.

Miss Letitia was a wise woman. Seeing that the society of Mr. Gray was inevitable, she resolved gracefully to make the best of a bad situation.

"He is a very pretty kitten—for a kitten," she admitted.

"How the Wyatts can make such fools of themselves over their cat passes my comprehension," Mrs. Lutterworth said to Laura Macauley. This was a year later, when Mr. Gray had become the chief ruler of the family. "I actually met Deborah coming home with a cat-basket for her precious Mr. Gray to take his naps in—it is such a crazy name to give an animal,—and they won't all go away together and shut up the house, on account of

the cat. I should like to lend them two or three of my children. I fancy I should hear less about Mr. Gray. It is astonishing how much time some people have to waste."

"Poor Lucy seems to be out of it altogether, now," said Laura Macauley. "I thought she was going to have something for her exclusive property at last, but Miss Deborah has taken complete possession of the cat. The sun rises and sets in Mr. Gray for her."

As the season went on, Mr. Gray showed new powers. Miss Deborah had been right in her expectations. To the consternation of gentle Miss Lucy, this second summer of his life he developed into a mighty hunter.

The first time that she saw him with a young robin Lucy experienced the pangs of an aunt whose favorite nephew has taken to disgraceful courses.

"Dear, you mustn't eat such things, they are God's creatures," she informed him, "and have a right to their life just as much as you have to yours. It is naughty, naughty, naughty. I shall have to punish you," and with averted face, she struck him two nervous, unsteady blows.

Mr. Gray looked at her with indescribable dignity, then he turned his back on her, and took refuge with Miss Deborah, on the other side of the room.

"Lucy, I am surprised at you," said her sister.

"Why should poor, dear Mr. Gray know that God's creatures, the robins, are any more sacred than mice? Lucy, do you suppose if you had always been taught that it was a praiseworthy act for you to catch and eat mice you would know by instinct that it was a terrible crime to kill a robin? Come here, darling. Come to your old auntie. Another time, dear, we will not catch the pretty robins, but this time, love, you did not know it was wrong."

For some reason best known to himself, Mr. Gray could never learn that it was wrong. Lucy gave up punishing him after a time, for she found it only made him turn against her and devote himself to her more indulgent sisters. And there came an unhappy moment when she was grateful if it was nothing worse than robins, for in the middle of the summer he learned the taste of young chickens.

"Dear," said Lucy to her sister Deborah, "I am really afraid we shall have to chain up Mr. Gray in the yard, for this is the second time Walter Brown has been over and complained that he has eaten one of their chickens."

"Chain up Mr. Gray! Lucy, I am surprised at you. How would you like to be chained up in the yard simply because you were fond of spring chicken? You should learn to do as you would be done by," Miss Deborah said with a gleam of merriment in her eyes.

"That is just what I am thinking. Suppose it was our chickens and their cat?"

"People who try to keep chickens in the middle of a country town must take the consequences."

"Don't you remember how you used to feel before we had a cat?" Lucy ventured. "You thought it was disgraceful for people to let their animals run riot?"

"That is a very different matter. Mr. Gray merely goes out for a little exercise."

"You know I promised to train him?" Lucy suggested.

"My dear, when you propose to punish a fellow-creature for doing what he considers his duty, then I think it is time for me to step in and interfere. Mr. Gray always lives up to his lights. Come here, dearest," and she gathered him up in her arms; "come to the friend who never misunderstands you."

"It does seem as if I might punish my own cat when I see fit," Lucy thought. "I hoped, when they neither of them wanted a cat, that he could be mine, all mine. And yet how absurd it is for me to be jealous,—yes, I am jealous, that is the ugly name for the feeling,—because a gray cat loves Deborah best. Dear Deborah, I ought to be glad."

When it was not only the Browns who com-

plained, but also the Wyatts' good friends, the Simondses, Lucy felt that she must interfere, no matter what it cost her.

Frances Simonds came over one morning and said, "I am very sorry, Miss Lucy, but it has happened again."

"Then I will certainly see that he is chained up in the yard."

Just then Miss Deborah came in.

"Frances says Mr. Gray has been eating their chickens again," said Lucy, "and I have told her I will see that he is chained up in the yard."

"I am by no means sure that Mr. Gray has eaten any chickens," Miss Deborah remarked with dignity.

"I never saw him eat one. Are you sure it wasn't a mouse, Frances? He's very fond of mice."

"I am sure it wasn't a mouse. It was yellow and downy."

"It may have been a bird," said Miss Deborah.

"I regret to state there is something about his moral nature which makes it impossible for us to convince him it is wrong to eat birds."

"It wasn't a bird," said Frances shortly. "It was one of our yellow chickens. I know it, because I saw it in his mouth, and besides, I counted; there were thirty yesterday, and now there are only twenty-nine."

“Well, Frances Simonds,” said Miss Deborah, cornered at last, “if you have thirty chickens, I do not think you need grudge one to poor, dear Mr. Gray.”

MR. GRAY'S RIVAL

III

MR. GRAY'S RIVAL

THE arrival of the Monday evening mail was the chief event of the week to the Miss Wyatts because it brought the New York letters. From the time that Mary Wyatt had become Mrs. Amos Forsyth, until just before her death, more than thirty years later, there had never been a break in the correspondence, save when the sisters were together. At last there had come an anxious Monday evening when no letter reached them, and later a few hurried lines from Mary's son John, with whom she had lived since his wife's death, telling of the illness of his mother, then a telegram saying that all was over, and finally that desolating gap that can never be bridged.

When the three sisters went on to the funeral, John begged that one of them would make her home with him and his children. Miss Letitia, the oldest sister, who had always been tenderly cherished on account of her beauty, and intellect, and her sensitive

nerves, could hardly be expected to begin to take care of other people at the age of fifty-six; Lucy, John's favorite aunt, who seemed more like his older sister, would have been only too thankful to stay, but she had a lack of experience in house-keeping, joined to the timidity that was the result of an abortive life, therefore it was John's aunt Deborah who stayed with him for a few weeks, making herself loved by her breezy cheerfulness, in spite of the occasional drastic tenor of her remarks. As she was the main prop of the household at home she could not be spared long, but she found an honest, capable woman to keep house for John, whom every reasonable person ought to have liked. It was certainly not Miss Deborah's fault that those spoiled children could not bear the house-keeper. So the arrangement ended with the winter, and the next summer John and the twins came to stay with his aunts, and, as an unexpected result, he married eighteen-year-old Esther Norris. It was two years and a half since that October morning when John and Esther drove away between the rows of flaming maples, into a new world, and even Miss Deborah had been forced to admit that the marriage had turned out unexpectedly well. She stayed with them one summer at the sea-shore (each sister took her turn) and she was completely won over by Esther's charms. It was Esther who suggested that

the habit of Sunday letter-writing should be resumed, and that John and the two children should each write one letter a month to their aunts, while she took the fourth Sunday. And so life had gone on, and while the old gap could never be filled, new interests and dear new faces were crowding in, for there was a baby now in the Forsyth household, a little Mary, named for that other Mary, who had written about John's babyhood more than thirty years ago.

"I suppose you have a letter for me," said Miss Letitia, as Lucy came in with the Monday evening mail.

"It is for Deborah this time."

"That is very strange. It is John's turn to write to me."

Miss Deborah opened her letter and gave an exclamation of surprise.

"I hope there is not any bad news?" Lucy asked anxiously.

"No. They are all well. John is proposing to bring all the family on to spend the summer with us."

"Upon my word, that is cool!" exclaimed Miss Letitia. "It is very strange he did not write to me when it is my turn, and I am the oldest," she added.

"I suppose he wrote to me because I am housekeeper. You can answer the letter, if you like."

"I have enough letters of my own to answer, thank you. I should think Esther would have the sense to see that it may not be convenient for us to have two grown people and two children and a nurse and baby to spend the summer."

"She has," and Miss Deborah read an extract from the letter.

"Esther tells me we are altogether too big a family now to inflict on you, and as her father's house is not large enough to receive us, she proposes our going to Mrs. Homer Newhall's boarding-house, but I told her my aunts would feel deeply hurt if we didn't come to them. Of course, if for any reason it is not convenient, you will let us know frankly. I long to have you all see Mary. She is beginning to walk and take notice, and yesterday she electrified me by saying 'papa.'"

"John is a perfect fool over that child," Miss Deborah observed. "Mary is thirteen months old, and ought to have said 'papa' weeks ago; Lucy said 'papa' and 'mamma' when she was nine months old, and John himself—and boys are not usually so forward as girls—began to talk when he was——"

"For heaven's sake spare us those reminiscences," said Miss Letitia. "What are you going to write to John?"

"Oh, I suppose they will have to come; but what on earth we can do about Mr. Gray I don't see.

Jack and Lily will tease him outrageously, poor creature, and he is used to such a placid life."

"I declare, Deborah, I believe you put the cat's comfort before that of your own family. *I* am used to a placid life too," Miss Letitia remarked.

"You can protect yourself. If the baby were only a little younger I shouldn't mind so much, but as soon as a child is big enough to walk it is big enough to get into every kind of mischief. Dear, fascinating little thing! I long to see her, but I would rather see her at the distance of Mrs. Newhall's boarding-house."

"Then why don't you have the courage of your convictions and say so to John?"

"Letitia!" Lucy cried reproachfully. "You wouldn't have the heart to let them go to a boarding-house when we have four spare-rooms!"

"We can manage the room well enough," said Miss Deborah. "We can give them the three south rooms-opening together."

"So you are planning to have me move out of my room?" Miss Letitia asked.

"Why, I thought you could move into mine, and I would take the little room. It would be so much more comfortable for them to have connecting rooms and an open fire."

Miss Deborah had known her sister for more than fifty years, and her faith in the inherent unself-

ishness of human nature was so great that she could still make a proposition of this kind.

"Letitia would never be happy in any room but her own," said Lucy, who had knocked her head against her sister's limitations too often not to recognize them. "It is no matter if they don't have connecting rooms. The nurse and the baby can be across the hall."

"I am very sorry about poor, dear Mr. Gray," said Miss Deborah, reverting to her pet. "I know that naughty baby will pull his tail and make him very unhappy, and as for Jack and Lily——"

"John is a dear fellow," Miss Letitia interrupted, "but, like all men, he is selfish. It never occurs to him to look at things from any point of view but his own."

They were coming, actually coming at last. Miss Deborah had gone to the station to meet them, and Miss Letitia and Lucy were waiting in the parlor, which was gay with a wealth of roses arranged in bowls and vases by Lucy's skilful fingers. It was not often that she was allowed to follow her own taste entirely, even in small things, but the others had been so busy with larger decisions that they had left the cutting and arranging of the flowers to her.

"My dear, you have a real genius for fixing

flowers," said Miss Letitia. She always recognized perfection when she saw it, but her praise was given so rarely that her words brought a glow to Lucy's heart.

At last there was the sound of wheels on the gravel, then came a gay laugh and a shrill voice called out, "Mr. Gray! What an awfully funny name for him. I thought he was a person when Aunt Lucy wrote about him first. Hi! Mr. Gray, you needn't be so scared of me. Hullo, Aunt Lucy!" and Jack rushed into the room, closely followed by his sister Lily. Next came John, carrying the baby with patriarchal pride, then Esther, rosy and happy, with a light in her eyes that made the whole world seem a brighter place, and finally the nurse.

"How good it is to be here again," said John, after he had greeted his aunts.

"Let me take Mary," Lucy begged. Having a baby in the house for two long months was a most delightful prospect.

Mary looked at her steadily for a moment with blue eyes that had something of the mystery and unfathomable quality of the sea. Then she put out her hands to go to her aunt Lucy.

"Dear little girl," said Lucy, taking her on her lap and giving her a kiss.

"Lucy, you mustn't kiss the baby; it isn't good

for her," Deborah said warningly. "And you hold her as if you thought she was going to break."

"My baby isn't brittle," Esther returned gaily.

Lucy looked at the mother's bright face. "There is such a thing as happiness in the world," she thought.

After the Forsyths had gone to their rooms to get ready for tea, Miss Letitia said: "Jack has grown a great deal. He is much more of a boy than he was. I foresee we shall have trouble with him."

To which Miss Deborah replied, "Yes, I am sorry he is so rough. I don't know what we shall do with Mr. Gray."

"It is even worse than I expected," confessed Miss Letitia. "Lily is less quiet too. I don't know how I am going to stand the noise. I don't know what Esther's nerves are made of. I am thankful I never married."

"I am glad I never did. I thank heaven every day of my life that I haven't a husband," declared Miss Deborah.

Lucy said nothing. Was Letitia, who had been the beauty and belle of Eppingham in her youth, really satisfied with her unstimulating life of indolence of body, joined to gentle activity of mind? Was this what it meant to have ceased to be young? Should she herself, in the years to come, learn to be contented with her life of trifles? Would there ever

be a time when she would not look with envious eyes at the women who, like Esther, had the fuller life, with its greater cares but higher happiness? Deborah seemed satisfied too, but hers was the content of the active woman who fills every hour with loving, if sometimes mistaken, service. They both seemed happy with what they had and to crave nothing more. Was it because they had chosen their own lives, while she had been refused the choice? How strange that this noisy inroad of life from the larger world, that filled her with such a keen sensation of joy, should be merely tolerated by them!

"Lucy, have you seen the cat?" Miss Deborah asked two evenings later.

"No. Didn't you bring him in?"

"Of course I did. I took him out for a little exercise, as usual, and then I chained him up in the yard. I do wish the Simondses would keep their chickens in the cellar, it would make life so much simpler for us," she said, with the gleam of humor in her eyes that always accompanied an especially preposterous remark. "Then I brought him in and put him in the kitchen, as I always do. And now I can't find him. Children," as Jack and Lily came rushing into the room, "have you seen Mr. Gray?"

"I let him out," said Jack.

"You let him out! You naughty boy! He will

stay out all night, and probably be chewed up by a bigger cat. Oh, my dear, dear Mr. Gray! Jack, didn't you know you were very naughty?"

"He seemed to want to get out awfully, Aunt Deborah. He was mewling like fury. I didn't know it was naughty, truly I didn't. He is awfully brave, Aunt Deborah, I guess he'll do most of the chewing up."

"I suppose he'll eat about a dozen of the Simonds' chickens," she said grimly. "If you had only waited until I had given him his supper! But he is as hungry as a hawk. Well, the only thing we can do now is to go out and see if we can find him."

They made an imposing procession as they set forth, Miss Deborah and Lucy in the rear, while Lily and Jack dashed madly forward.

"What is the matter?" called Miss Letitia from the window, and when she was told she, too, descended into the arena. Bridget joined them with a saucer of milk in her hand, while John and Esther, who were just returning from a walk, increased the numbers of the search party. Alas! Nothing was to be seen of Mr. Gray in the Wyatts' premises, so they proceeded to their next-door neighbor's house.

Frances Simonds was sitting on the back piazza sewing, when they approached.

"How delightful this is!" she exclaimed, thinking they had come for an afternoon call. Bridget was in the background, and Frances had not caught sight of her and the saucer of milk.

"We are looking for Mr. Gray," Miss Deborah explained. "By an accident"—this was generous of her—"he got out of the kitchen——"

"I let him out," said Jack, who liked the glory of the exploit. "He was mewing awfully, and I thought he would be happier——"

"Goodness!" said Frances, rising hastily, "I hope he hasn't caught any of our chickens."

The chickens were safe, which seemed to prove that Mr. Gray's evening stroll had been taken in the opposite direction, so the little company changed its course. Most of the party returned discouraged to the house, but Miss Deborah and the children faithfully hunted far and near, but although some persons went so far as to say they had seen a gray cat, no one had any definite news to give, and gray cats were plentiful in the neighborhood.

"I declare," said Miss Deborah that evening, "I feel as badly as if Mr. Gray were a person, worse, for people know when they are doing wrong. To think of that poor, dear creature out all night. He has never been out a single night in his life, bless his dear heart."

"It is beginning to rain. I had a presentiment

that there would be trouble if the Forsyths came on this summer," said Miss Letitia ominously.

Miss Letitia went to bed and slept the sleep of the just, Lucy worried a great deal and woke several times in the night, while Miss Deborah sat up until after twelve o'clock, hoping in vain for the prodigal's return. When she at last went to bed her sleep was broken by troubled dreams. At five o'clock in the morning she was wakened by heart-piercing mews. She rose hastily and joyfully let Mr. Gray in at the door that opened on the upper piazza. He looked humbled and chastened. One ear had received a wound, and his poor fur was draggled by the rain.

"Dear boy," she said catching him up in her arms, "your old auntie has been breaking her heart over you. Life would be a dreary affair without my darling boy. You are worth a dozen baby Marys, do you hear? Lucy can make a fool of herself over that child if she likes, but I am constant to my old friends. Poor dear creature, to have his precious ear torn! You can never tell me about the fright and horror of this dreadful night. And I know you have been jealous of the baby, dear. What do I care about babies?"

Lucy had heard the mews. She went quickly downstairs and arrived in time to hear the greater part of her sister's speech. "If she will only keep

on feeling so!" she thought. "Mr. Gray is a perfect dear—for a cat—he is a great deal better than nothing, but the baby is worth a dozen Mr. Grays!"

To steal upstairs to the nursery, to sit on the floor by the hour together with baby Mary, to hand her a spool of thread or a rattle, merely to have her drop it with laughing glee, in order that her devoted relative might pick it up,—to repeat this performance over and over again, was the greatest happiness Lucy had known for years.

"Lucy, you must make a stand, or you will be imposed on," Miss Deborah informed her a few days later. "Esther is a dear child, but it isn't in human-nature not to take advantage of a bridge over a stream, when you want to go across, even if the bridge is made by the prostrate body of a devoted relative. Esther had much better stay at home and look after her own baby. There is no occasion for her seeing so much of her girl friends, and she and John have surely been married long enough not to need so many tête-à-tête drives."

"But I love to take care of the baby, and Esther knows she is giving me the greatest possible happiness in letting me do it. Nora takes all the responsibility. I am delighted to give Esther a little rest. And as for the drives, just think how many times John and Esther have taken two of us with them. I am sure they are most considerate."

“ Oh, I suppose they are as considerate as you can expect two such heedless young things to be. The modern parent is a profound mystery to me. In my day people took all the care of their babies, or else the bigger children looked after the little ones. Many a time I have trundled you about in your baby-carriage when I was longing to play ‘ Hi-spy ’ with Letitia and the other girls.”

“ It was a shame. I wish mother could have afforded a nursery-maid.”

That evening as the Wyatts were sitting around their cheerful tea-table, they heard shrieks issuing from the baby's room, as Esther came out and shut the door. John was taking tea with his classmate, Ned Simonds, and it was Nora's evening out. Her evenings out, by the way, were of frequent occurrence, for she was a young thing and needed diversion.

The sisters looked at each other for a moment in a silence too shocked for words. At last Miss Letitia said, “ Do you suppose she is going to leave that child crying like that? ”

“ It does not seem possible,” said Miss Deborah.

Presently Esther came gaily into the room. She had been playing tennis, and had come home just in time to give the baby her supper and put her to bed. Esther had on her bicycle skirt, and her pretty hair was curling in little rings around her face, while the

exercise had given her a color even brighter than usual.

"I'm awfully sorry to be late, Aunt Deborah," she said. "We were having a most exciting tennis match; John and I played against Frances and Ned Simonds, and we beat them, although we did it by the skin of our teeth. I thought that was doing pretty well for a humdrum pair from New York city. I didn't have time to do my hair, or change my dress. I will after tea. Oh, do you mind?" she added, noticing the gathering cloud on the faces of her aunts.

"I am wondering how you can leave that poor child screaming, upstairs," Miss Deborah said.

Esther laughed. "It is nothing but temper. She didn't want me to come downstairs; the doctor told me not to humor her," she added, as she helped herself to tomato salad. "If I had stayed with her to-night, she would howl like that every evening when we leave her. Poor little soul, it seemed very hard-hearted to come off; but she'll get over it in a minute."

Lucy wondered how any mother could take those heart-breaking screams so calmly, Miss Deborah felt indignant, and Miss Letitia was driven nearly frantic by the noise.

"Don't you think somebody had better go upstairs and stop her?" she asked. "I have had a

bad headache all day, and although I dare say the discipline of leaving her alone may be good for her, it is just a little hard on me."

"Oh, you poor dear," said Esther, looking regretfully at her salad, "I never thought of that. I'll go right up myself," and she rose hastily.

"Let me go," Lucy entreated. "I have finished my supper."

"Lucy, you haven't eaten enough to keep a bird alive," said Miss Deborah reproachfully. "Let Esther manage her own baby."

Lucy gently pushed Esther back into her seat. "I would like to go to her," she said.

She ran swiftly upstairs. Mary was already crying less violently. Her rage had given way to grief. If she had the Forsyth temper, she had also inherited the Norris disposition to make the best of things. She was sitting up in her crib and her two dimpled hands were put helplessly up to her rosy face, while the tears stood in her reproachful blue eyes.

"You darling," Lucy cried, catching her up and kissing her with passionate tenderness. "You little dear. Come to Aunt Lucy, come, dear, dear baby, and we'll, 'Ride a cock horse to Banbury Cross.'"

The baby was much pleased with this invitation, and subsequent events proved that she was not too young to learn the lesson of cause and effect. When she was in New York she cried in vain, nobody in-

vaded her solitude, but here it required only a few screams to bring a kind, yellow-haired lady with a gently rustling gown, who took her out of her wretched crib, and danced her on her knees, and this friendly Aunt Lucy would stay until she was fairly asleep, and it was much more sociable. Then there was one never-to-be-forgotten evening when the yellow-haired aunt was very tired, and the short, stout aunt came upstairs in her place.

"Lucy," Miss Deborah had said, "you are getting perfectly worn out with the vagaries of that imp of a child. John and Esther ought not to have gone out to tea when Nora was out too. No, you shall not get off that sofa, I forbid it. I'll go up to Mary. I can make her behave herself in two minutes."

Lucy looked at the clock, and became more and more jealous as the time passed and her sister did not come down. Ten minutes went by, quarter of an hour, twenty minutes, it was a shame, baby Mary would get to love Deborah best, people, as well as cats, always did sooner or later, and no wonder, Lucy was obliged to own with a remorseful sigh. There never was a more unselfish, spontaneous, whole-souled woman than her sister Deborah.

Miss Deborah, meanwhile, had approached the baby with feelings of exasperation. Of course Lucy had spoiled the child. Lucy always did spoil everybody. If no one had gone up to Mary that first

evening no one need ever have gone. Esther had been right, she knew the characteristics of her child better than they did, but the mischief had been done, and now it was for her, Deborah Wyatt, to discipline this small piece of humanity, as she had disciplined the baby's grandmother and her great-aunt Lucy.

"Well, Mary Forsyth," she began, as she entered the nursery, "this is a pretty piece of business! To keep three quiet maiden-ladies in a stew like this every evening. Either you howl until your aunt Letitia is ready for the 'Nervine,' or else your poor aunt Lucy, dear, delicate child, has to spend her evening with you. I am positively ashamed of you. You are a disgrace to the family. Do you hear?"

Baby Mary heard. How much she understood it were difficult to say, but she stopped crying and fastened her blue eyes on the rosy face of her aunt with a fascinated gaze. The next moment she electrified her by saying, "Debba."

"Oh, the darling child," cried Miss Deborah. "She is trying to say my name, and she hasn't once tried to say 'Lucy' or 'Letitia.' The dear, precious, amusing little monkey! Dear baby, you must go to sleep, but I don't get up to the nursery very often, so first I'll say 'Robert Barnes, fellow fine,' to you, once, only once, remember," and she lifted her out of the crib.

Miss Deborah sat down in the low chair, and turning up one tiny soft pink foot she patted it vigorously as she repeated the childish classic. When it came to—

“ Here a nail and there a prod ;
Now good Sir, your horse is shod,”

she pinched the little foot with a will and tossed it vigorously in the air. Mary was delighted. She laughed uproariously, and put out the other little foot invitingly.

“ Well, just once more,” said Miss Deborah.

At the end of the second performance the baby put out her right foot again.

“ You little monkey,” said her aunt. “ No more, positively no more.”

Mary looked thoughtful, then she put out her left foot, and in accents that would have melted a heart of stone she said, “ Debba.”

When Miss Deborah at last went downstairs her face wore the noncommittal look of a person who does not wish to be questioned.

“ Have you seen the evening paper ? ” she asked Lucy.

“ Letitia had it a moment ago. She has just gone upstairs to get her embroidery. What kept you so long ? ” Lucy inquired after a moment's silence.

“ Was I long ? ” Miss Deborah demanded with

candid innocence. "Mary was a little restless. It took longer to quiet her than I expected."

It was in vain for Miss Deborah to try to keep her new relations with the baby a secret, for that young person gave the situation away, the very next morning. When she was brought downstairs and her aunt Lucy was going to take her, as usual, she shook her head, and looking past her to the sprightly aunt who was knitting the red stripe of an afghan, she said, "Debba."

"So you taught her to say your name last night?" Lucy asked, with that stab at the heart with which she was only too familiar.

"I didn't. Honestly I didn't. The witch suddenly said, 'Debba,' out of the whole cloth. I couldn't have been more startled if the gilt cock on the Browns' stable were to begin to crow. The monkey looks so small, and as if her mind were just a vacant sheet of paper. Say 'Lucy,' dear. That is a much prettier name. 'Lucy, Lucy.'"

"Debba."

"No, 'Lucy.'"

"Debba."

Mary laughed. The Wyatt sense of humor had evidently been transmitted to her.

"You are an ungrateful little wretch. Aunt Lucy is the person who is a slave to you."

"Debba," and she put out her foot.

"Oh, you want me to say, 'Robert Barnes, fellow fine,' do you? I know a great many nicer things than that. If I am to be manager of a theatre I will at least have a variety in the plays," and taking the baby in her lap Miss Deborah began, "This little pig went to market, this little pig stayed at home," and so on down the line of Mary's small fingers.

"I am so glad we came on this summer," Esther confided to her husband a fortnight later. "I was afraid the baby would be too much for your aunts. They were used to the other children, and knew what to expect, but the baby was an unknown quantity. I didn't think Aunt Deborah would be so devoted to her."

"That was only because you didn't know Aunt Deborah."

"Well, I know her now. I used to be afraid of her, before I was married, but she is the dearest old thing in the world. I declare she grows younger every day. Before long she——"

"You see I was right in vetoing your proposition to go to a boarding-house," John broke in. "It seemed a pity that three ladies with such a wealth of affection should lavish it all on a cat."

Mr. Gray, who was lying on the hearth-rug, looked as if he had his own views on this subject.

"Poor old fellow," said Esther, taking the cat

up in her arms, "don't mind what John says. He is nothing but a clumsy man. You are nicer than he is in ever so many ways. You never interrupt, and you always let me have the last word."

"And in this case the last word is that the baby——" John began.

"Is even nicer than Mr. Gray," she finished.

THE NEWHALL FARM

IV

THE NEWHALL FARM

“**L**UCY, if it doesn’t rain to-morrow, will you go to the Newhall farm with me to buy a cow?” Miss Deborah asked.

The Newhall farm brought up such a host of memories to Lucy that she was silent for a moment, half-longing, half-dreading to accept the invitation.

“Won’t Letitia go with you?” she inquired.

“Letitia! Letitia would never be satisfied with any cow that walks this earth, unless it gave twenty-four quarts of milk a day, half cream, and had unrivaled beauty into the bargain. No, thank you. I have taken Letitia’s advice too often. She would want to drive all around the country to a dozen farms, and see twenty cows, before she decided, and it would end in our not getting any, or making a Hobson’s choice just as the baby was leaving, and as I am investing in a cow so that Mary can have pure milk, I’d rather get it while she’s here, espe-

cially as I'm buying the animal with John's money. I thought we would take our tea with us."

"If we are going to have a picnic the children will enjoy coming too."

"No, thank you. The children are all very well in their way, but I want my 'afternoon out,' and I should like your company."

"I don't know anything about cows," Lucy objected.

"Neither do I, but old Peter Newhall is an honest soul. He would never palm off an inferior cow on me."

On the rare occasions when Deborah and Lucy went anywhere without Letitia, there was a certain freedom, a childishness in their joy of which they were half ashamed. They had to go through the form of asking her to take the drive with them, for otherwise her feelings would have been hurt.

"Letitia," Deborah said, "do you care to go to the Newhall farm with Lucy and me to-morrow? I am meaning to buy my cow there."

"Why do you take that long drive? There must be good cows nearer home."

"Lucy and I don't mind the drive. We shall make it easy by taking our supper with us and eating it under a tree."

There was a wicked gleam in Miss Deborah's eyes as she made this statement.

"If there is one thing I dislike more than another it is eating out of doors," Miss Letitia returned. "I have no fondness for gypsy ways, and then it has rained so hard the grass will be damp, and lastly, I am not partial to ants."

And so it happened that Miss Deborah and Lucy started off the next afternoon in a buggy. It may have been selfish, Miss Deborah was perfectly willing to admit that it was, when she saw Lily and Jack eying the vehicle and the lunch-basket with wistful eyes, but the children had already participated in four picnics, and it was still early in July. This afternoon, as they drove through the village, Lucy's heart was as light as if she had not fallen a victim to Deborah's stronger will, and her sense of injury, which was all the more poignant, because unexpressed, was lulled to sleep. There was an especial congeniality between the two sisters, in spite of a lack of comprehension. Lucy's gentleness and exquisite refinement gave Deborah the keenest pleasure, while Deborah's humor and her practical point of view were as refreshing as a tonic to her more sensitively organized sister. To-day Lucy was captivated anew by Deborah. No wonder the baby loved her!

"We have six hours in which to behave as badly as we like," Miss Deborah announced. "We have no standard to set for the young."

It was a glorious afternoon. The sun had come out that morning for the first time in three days, and was shining with a prodigal liberality which suggested that he was refreshed by his holiday. Trees, grass, and shrubs had all profited by the rain and were a vivid green. The raspberry bushes were white with starry blossoms along the roadside, and the irregular stone walls gave a touch of somber color to the otherwise resplendent landscape. A couple of song-sparrows trilled out their liquid notes as the sisters drove by. Lucy had suffered in the past; her imagination and her common sense alike told her that she would suffer again in the future, but on this marvelous July day she could only add a silent song of thanksgiving to the more musical but no more heartfelt chorus of praise of the song sparrows. As they approached the Newhall farm memories detached themselves from the haze of the distant past, recollections that were sometimes sweet, sometimes intolerably bitter. To-day the sweet predominated. Lucy saw herself as a tiny girl running barefoot in the fields with an older girl and boy, learning a wealth of childish lore about birds and flowers and the signs of the sky; reveling in a love of nature so keen it was almost intoxicating. She had spent a part of six happy summers in her childhood at the Newhall farm. It was not until she was a girl of thirteen and Alec a boy of

seventeen that it ever crossed her mind there was a wide gulf fixed between them. But that summer Letitia had passed a part of the holiday with her, and had sowed the first seeds of worldly wisdom in her mind. She told her that it had been all very well to be friends with Sophy and Alec when they were children, but she was getting too big a girl now; they were in a different class from herself. She must be polite to them, of course; it would be unkind to hurt their feelings, but she must be on her guard. Before that summer the Newhall farm had stood for Paradise to Lucy; but after the serpent had entered in and she had eaten of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, the old happiness was gone. In spite of later events, which had proved to the satisfaction of her family that Alec was the last man to whom they would have been willing to entrust her happiness, such was the glamour of those old days that Lucy never could think of that eager young face and those ardent dark eyes without emotion. Whatever he was in later life, and even yet she had not become used to the surprise and pain of it, he had been a delightful young fellow, with a charm that had taken the flavor out of other men for her ever since. And now this afternoon she was to see his father for the first time in many years!

The road led through woods that were alive with birds and fragrant with flowers, and up hills whence

they could get a view of still higher hills misty on the horizon, and everywhere there was the enchantment that Nature has for her lovers, an enchantment that was so great as for the moment to counterbalance all the joys of youth in Lucy's mind.

"Life is a game of consequences," said Miss Deborah. "One thing follows another just as it does in 'The House that Jack Built.'"

"Yes," said Lucy, softly. She was thinking of her own past, and supposed that Deborah had it in mind also.

"Who would have thought," Miss Deborah went on, "that John's marrying Esther Norris would have been the indirect cause of my buying a cow?"

In her relief that her sister was not trenching on any more personal ground, Lucy's laugh was almost hysterical.

"I won't deny that I have been longing for years for a good excuse for buying a cow," Miss Deborah continued, "an excuse that would justify itself to Letitia and to the neighborhood. Now, to tell you the honest truth (I would not own it to a soul but you, Lucy, but you are as secret as the grave), I am glad that Mr. Gray is to have the best of milk, poor dear creature, instead of milkman's milk diluted by water; but you can't buy a cow on account of your cat and keep your self-respect under the

gibes of your neighbors. Letitia will like the good milk as well as anyone, and she can't call it an extravagance, so long as John is generous enough to make us a present of the cow. Of course it isn't as if the animal wouldn't eat and didn't have to be taken care of. I can see that as well as Letitia can, but Patrick will take care of her for very little more money than we pay him at present, and we can sell milk to the Simonds.

They were driving up the last hill now, and the weather-beaten farmhouse, gray with the exposure of years, stood out in sharp relief against the deep-blue sky. Lucy's heart beat more quickly as she caught sight of the wide stone step that stood before the side door, and the cinnamon-roses that were blooming with the same luxuriance with which they had blossomed in her childhood. A barefooted girl and boy were sitting on the step playing shop, with rose-leaves for money, just as she and Alec had done. They were the children of the young couple who lived with Mr. Newhall to take care of him and do the farm work. Old Peter Newhall was expecting Miss Deborah, and came out to greet her with that combination of dignity and simplicity characteristic of the free-born American of the hill country.

"I am so glad to see you here again," he said. He gave her a scrutinizing glance, and then added,

"You've fleshed up considerable since I saw you last. I never thought you'd be so good-looking."

Miss Deborah laughed, and turned to greet the young foreman.

"And this is little Lucy!" Mr. Newhall said, with a touch of tenderness in his voice. "Seems as though it was only last year you was running 'round here barefooted with my children, and not more than knee-high to a grasshopper, and now——"

"Now I am a middle-aged woman."

"Don't call yourself that. You're a young thing yet. Wait until you are eighty years old, and you'll find you'll look back to the age you are now, and think it hardly more than girlhood."

He gave her a long, keen look, and then said, "You have the same hair and eyes, but you've got considerable many lines in your face for one that has led such a sheltered life. I want to show you my garden. Harry, you take Miss Deborah out to the pasture, and let her be looking at the cows; if she don't like Cowslip, mebbly Daisy'll suit her, and then there's Dandelion. I'll come along presently."

Lucy followed Mr. Newhall to the old-fashioned garden that had been the delight of her childhood. Dyeletras were there, and hollyhocks, sunflowers, petunias, pansies, larkspurs, and portulacca.

"The dear old garden!" said Lucy. And once

more she saw herself as a barefooted child gathering nosegays with Alec, and his dark eyes looked at her with the old childish confidence before the shadow had come into them.

"I never can go into this garden without thinking of Alec," said Alec's father softly, as he began to pick the flowers. "You won't mind an old-fashioned bokay for once, will you? Picked by an old man in memory of old times? I know it ain't stylish to put 'em in all together, but you can take 'em apart when you get 'em home."

"I love them just as they are," said Lucy. "I could not spare one. It is like assorted recollections," she added shyly.

He looked at her sharply. "Now, what do you mean by that?"

"I mean that every flower tells its own story, and has its separate association, and that they all speak to me of the happiest time in my life."

There was silence between them for a moment, then the old man said slowly, "You seemed so happy together I never could understand why you couldn't care for him a little more. Of course we were plain people," he went on, "and your folks held their heads high, especially your father and Letitia. They say all men are born free and equal; it ain't true. It is only when they are dead they are on the same level. Your father and my Alec are

lying near neighbors now, and one doesn't hold his head any higher than the other."

He was silent again, and then he said, "Time was I was as sure you would be Alec's wife as I am that we are both standing here."

"He never asked me," said Lucy in a low tone.

Peter Newhall glanced at her sharply, but her eyes, looking straight into his face with their old steadfastness, assured him that she was speaking the truth.

"Is that so?" he said. "There's other ways of asking besides putting a question in plain words," he continued, presently. "If he never asked you, it must have been because you had shown him what the answer would be. There was a Sunday night—I never shall forget that Sunday night when he'd been to meeting in Eppingham. I knew very well why he took that long drive; 't want for any love of the Gospel. Alec, poor fellow, never was a great hand to go to church, and when he came back, and I asked him if he had spoken with Lucy Wyatt, he turned on me with a face like a thunder-cloud. I can't exactly remember what he said, only he swore at me—poor Alec, he wa'n't one to swear in general—and he told me he never wanted to hear Lucy Wyatt's name again."

Lucy's mind went back to that Sunday morning, and she recalled all the incidents connected with

it, so trifling in themselves, so momentous in their consequences. It was after Alec's return from the West; he had not made a success of life there. Even at the time she could see that her father and sisters were right in doubting his stability, and as she and Letitia were walking to church together, Letitia had said, "I dare say we shall see Alec Newhall. If we do, don't stop to speak to him. I wouldn't cut him for anything in the world; it is cruel to go back on an old friend, only, if he tries to speak to us, we'll bow to him politely, but distantly, as if his being at home or in the West were all the same to us. It is kinder to him in the end to dash his hopes at once, or else he will be continually hanging around you, now he has come home for good."

All through the long service Lucy's mind was fixed on those eager dark eyes at the back of the church. She felt that they were riveted on her golden hair and flowered muslin gown. When the service was over, Letitia drew Lucy's arm through hers and took her up to thank old Mr. Moorhouse for his sermon. They stood there for some time talking to one person and another, until Lucy was in a fever of impatience, fearing that Alec would have gone home, but when they came out into the sunshine, there he stood, a smile on his face, a happy light in his eyes, one hand out-

stretched to greet Miss Letitia, who was nearer him. She bowed with that combination of dignity, distant graciousness and icy stiffness of which she was mistress. An empress might thus have greeted the humblest of her subjects. Alec's hand fell to his side and his expression changed. He looked at Lucy with an appealing glance that stirred her to her heart's core. Her impulse was to brave Letitia's displeasure and put out her hand to greet her old playfellow with a little fragment of the affection that filled her heart. She longed to say, "Alec, I am glad you have come home. Won't you come to see me? Can't you dine with us to-day?" She had often wondered what would have happened if she had said those few words. Instead of that the fear of Letitia, joined to shyness and her conscientious wish not to encourage Alec, for the seeds of worldliness that had been planted in her mind had grown, and she was by no means sure that she wished to marry him; these things prevented her yielding to her first impulse. She bowed with a softened reproduction of her sister's nod and passed on. She could not measure the full effect of such a bow coming from one who was usually so gentle and friendly. In the days that followed, she still expected a call from Alec, or a chance meeting, some occasion in which she could retrieve the mischief done in that half minute. But Alec went

back to the West, instead of staying to be the prop of his father's advancing years, and when in the course of time he made one of those reckless marriages that good women living sheltered lives speak of with bated breath, it could hardly be expected that Letitia could refrain from saying, "I told you so." She did not say it baldly in just those words, but rang the changes in half a dozen ways on the unreliability of Alec Newhall and her sister's lucky escape. It would have been a great misfortune if Lucy had given her heart to a man who, besides being her inferior in birth, was so deplorably lacking in moral stamina. Lucy agreed with Letitia. She summoned pride to her aid and did her best to try to love a dull young man who was attracted to her.

"Poor Alec," said Alec's father softly.

Lucy came back to the present with a start. The bouquet of "assorted recollections" was almost finished. Peter Newhall was adding to the bright array of gaudy flowers pansies "for thought."

"I know he never set out to do wrong. He wa'n't headed that way when he was a boy," he said in a low voice. "He had good impulses. No one who loved the sky and the birds and all growing things as he did could be bad at heart."

Lucy was silent.

"I don't want you to feel too hard towards my

poor boy. There's others no better than he that don't get punished half so hard, and there's folks that never sinned, because they wa'n't tempted. There's Frank Hollis, his second cousin, who was so crazy about your sister Letitia. Well, when she wouldn't have him, he took up with my Sophy, and she's been a devoted wife to him for all these years. Frank wa'n't half so bright as my boy or half so pleasant-mannered, but he's led a useful life and preached the gospel for more'n thirty years, and my boy is dead, and all the good in him is forgotten."

"It is not forgotten," said Lucy, turning her blue eyes towards him brimming with tears.

"Seems though the Lord punished some sins out of proportion to their size," he mused. "Frank was cool and sort o' cautious, and my boy was like quicksilver; he had a temper and too much pride, but it seemed hard that one should be so successful and the other so unfortunate."

"Lucy, are you never coming?" called Miss Deborah, in her cheerful contralto. "I must have your advice about the cow."

Lucy started obediently to go to her sister.

"Guess you're one that's obeyed all your life," the old man said, significantly.

COWSLIP

V

COWSLIP

IT was always easy for Miss Deborah to make a choice, and she had chosen Cowslip with hardly a moment's hesitation. Therefore it was not Lucy's advice she wanted, but merely the support of her admiration. Cowslip was a pretty Alderney. The only fault that could be found with her looks was a white patch placed on her face in an irregular way, which Lucy felt instinctively would be very trying to Letitia, and yet it did not seem of sufficient importance to prevent the purchase. So Cowslip became the property of the Wyatts, and Mr. Gray no longer reigned supreme.

When the cow arrived the whole family went out to the barn to see her installed, and John, Esther, and the children were loud in her praises. Miss Letitia looked at her in a more critical spirit. "How many cows did you have to choose from?" she asked Deborah.

"Three."

"I should think you might have found a better-looking one."

"Why, I love that deep fawn color," said Esther.

"The color is all right, but that white patch on her face drives me wild, it is so one-sided."

"I didn't think about that," said Deborah.

"I never knew any one with so little esthetic sense as you have," Letitia remarked patiently. "I should have bought a cow that was not conspicuous. However, if you and Lucy like her, it is of no consequence whether I am satisfied. I am quite accustomed to accepting the choice of others. Only I can't see how two people with average eyes could have looked at that cow without noticing that the white spot gave her a weird expression. Her milk will be just as good," she added, with an assumption at cheerfulness.

Miss Deborah's pleasure in the possession of the cow was considerably dampened. She tried to recollect whether Daisy and Dandelion had white spots on their faces, and went so far as to suggest that they might effect an exchange.

"No," said Miss Letitia. "There would be some out about the others. You have bought her, and it is best to keep her."

"How is Peter Newhall?" she asked Lucy, that evening. "I always liked him. He is such a typical farmer of the old school; a quiet, God-fearing

old fellow. It is hard he should have had such a trial in his youngest son. Sophy was very different. She was essentially a lady. She had the advantage of being sent away to school, and her acquaintance with Deborah, and Clara Hollis, and me did a great deal for her. I always liked Sophy; she was unselfish and good. A little dull, to be sure. I never could see why a man like Frank Hollis married her, but as a rule men seem to be happier with dull wives. Homer Newhall was very much like Sophy. He never would have set the river on fire. I have no doubt he was a great loss to his wife. It is hard she should have to come down to taking boarders. I can't think where Alec got his reckless disposition. There must have been bad blood on the mother's side of the house."

Lucy made an excuse to leave the room. Her cheeks were burning, and she felt stifled with the emotions of twenty years.

"You look tired, dear," said Letitia. "I was afraid that long drive would be too much for you."

"I have a little headache."

"I knew it would be bad for you, taking your supper out of doors and sitting on the damp grass, but I am tired of throwing cold water on your plans. I find it best to let you learn by experience."

Miss Letitia had nothing but the highest praise

to give Cowslip's milk and cream. "I had no idea there was such a difference between cow's milk and milkman's milk," she observed graciously.

The baby's drooping health revived, the children took long draughts of milk at frequent intervals, and the family reveled in desserts with an accompaniment of whipped cream. It had seemed to outsiders as if Mr. Gray were as prosperous as it was possible for one of his kind to be, before the arrival of Cowslip, but his aunt Deborah, with the insight of affection, discovered a more serene expression on his face, and was sure there was an addition to his weight after he had lived for a fortnight on the best of milk. They were a very happy family for a month, and then, owing to the intense August heat, Cowslip fell ill.

"I have always heard that Alderneys are more delicate than any other cows," Miss Letitia observed ominously at breakfast one morning.

"Look here, Letitia Wyatt," said Miss Deborah, "I will stand a great deal from you, but that is a little too much. The next time we have a cow you may choose her, and see to the whole care of her. I had the bother of buying Cowslip, and I have had no end of trouble with her first and last, and I won't stand being criticized."

Letitia looked at her sister reproachfully. Deborah's occasional outbreaks of temper were one of

the chief trials of her lot. They were so unreasonable, so unexpected.

"My dear," she said gently, "I was not criticising. I was merely stating a fact." Miss Letitia had never ceased to be thankful that she had inherited her mother's even temper.

"I was a beast," Miss Deborah owned remorsefully. "I am tired out with anxiety about Cowslip. She is a dear creature, and she looked at me this morning with such sad, reproachful eyes, begging me to do something to help her. Heaven knows I would spend my life with her, if it would do any good."

"Why don't you hold an umbrella over her, Aunt Deborah?" Jack suggested.

"I have been thinking of something of the kind. The veterinary surgeon says she is too ill to be moved. We can't even get her into the shade. Patrick has tied a wet sponge to her horns, but she still feels the heat. I proposed to Patrick that he should make some sort of a shelter for her, but he didn't see it in that light. He was 'driv' with other work,' as he expressed it. That is the trouble with having only a tenth of a man. When I am rich I shall keep a whole one. I wish Laura Macauley would lend me her sketching-umbrella."

Lily and Jack dashed off in quest of Miss Mac-

auley. They were not commissioned to do so, but thought it well to take time by the forelock.

Laura Macauley, cool and self-contained, was sitting on her side piazza with the latest *Atlantic Monthly* in her hands, when two breathless, disheveled children rushed up to her.

"Please, Miss Laura, Aunt Deborah wants to borrow your sketching-umbrella," Jack panted.

"Your Aunt Deborah wants to borrow my sketching-umbrella?" Miss Macauley asked incredulously. She had never associated the fine arts with Miss Deborah Wyatt.

"It is for the cow," Lily explained.

Miss Macauley was under the impression that somebody wanted to make a sketch of Miss Deborah's favorite. "Who paints at your house?" she inquired.

"It is for the cow," Lily repeated. "She is sick, and we thought it would be a good plan to hold an umbrella over her, and yours is the biggest in town."

"Did your Aunt Deborah send you here?"

"She didn't exactly send us," Lily confessed. "She just wished you would lend her the umbrella, and so we came for it to save time."

Miss Macauley's sense of humor was not of the keenest, but the picture of Miss Deborah Wyatt, who had always scorned the amount of wasted time that the sketching-umbrella represented, being re-

duced to abjectly borrow it for her cow appealed even to her. She threw back her head and laughed.

"The cow is real sick," said Jack. "I don't see why you think it's so funny."

"We've got it, Aunt Deborah," the children said a little later, as they thrust the sketching-umbrella into Miss Deborah's astonished hands.

"My dear children! Who told you to go for that umbrella?"

"We thought we would surprise you."

"I was only joking. I never dreamed of really borrowing Laura's sacred umbrella. Letitia, do you think I ought to send it back?" Miss Deborah's outbreak of temper had left her in a chastened mood. Under these circumstances she was willing to ask her sister's advice.

"I don't know. What did she say, children?"

"She laughed and laughed when she heard the cow was sick. I guess she wouldn't think it was so funny if it was her cow. And she said—what was it she said, Lily? She was so particular for us to remember it exactly."

"She said, 'Please give my compliments to your aunt Deborah, and tell her I am glad she can find such a good use for my sketching-umbrella.'"

"You may as well keep it, as she was kind enough to send it," Letitia counseled. So the umbrella stayed. Miss Deborah and the children went with

it to the enclosure behind the garden, where the cow was stretched limply on the parched August grass. Miss Deborah planted the umbrella firmly in the ground, and its generous shade kept the sun from poor Cowslip's head.

"There," said Miss Deborah, when her work was accomplished, "I am glad that umbrella is doing a useful deed for once in its life. Children, run in and ask your aunt Letitia to give you the big palm-leaf fan that stands on the top of the right-hand book-case in the library, and I will fan this poor creature; the flies are troubling her; and bring out the little camp-stool."

There was nothing funny to the children in the picture their aunt Deborah made as she sat on her camp-stool that hot forenoon waving her large palm-leaf fan, and it is safe to assert that the humorous side did not strike Cowslip. Miss Letitia was amused when she sallied out towards twelve o'clock to see how her sister was faring.

"Deborah, you look too absurd in your short skirt with that huge fan under that immense umbrella. You remind me of a toad under a toad-stool. I never saw anything so funny in my life."

"I am glad if you are amused."

"I wish you could see yourself," and Miss Letitia laughed again. "Perhaps you would like me to send your dinner to you?" she added ironically.

"I should like to swear at you, Letitia Wyatt, that is what I should like. You are enough to drive a saint crazy."

"I didn't mean to make you angry. I never can tell what is going to make you angry," Letitia remarked in an injured tone. "I was merely in fun. You can usually see the funny side of things as well as anyone."

"If you think it is easy to see the funny side of the dangerous illness of your only cow, when you have been broiling like a lobster in her service, you can take your turn and try it. I am a little tired, and will give up my place to you willingly."

"Thank you. The hot sun always gives me a headache."

"It is very lucky that I am so constituted that I like the scorching sun."

"Deborah, dear, I am sure you are very tired. Do leave that cow to herself. A few flies won't hurt her. You are of more importance than the cow. If she is going to die she will die, and if she is going to get well she will get well."

"Good-by, Letitia Wyatt. I have enjoyed your call exceedingly, but I think you ought not to stay out any longer in the broiling sun."

"Why don't you get Lily and Jack to fan her?"

"Why don't I get chain lightning to help me?"

"Deborah, I insist, for your own good, upon your coming into the house *at once*."

"Letitia, *I won't*."

Miss Deborah had been fully intending to take a recess, but she was not going to be ordered in by Letitia.

Miss Letitia went back and held a family council. As the result, Lucy came out presently with a glass of lemonade and a piece of sponge-cake.

"Now, Deborah, just let me fan Cowslip for a few minutes," she coaxed, as her sister gratefully accepted the proffered lunch.

"My dear, you will get a sunstroke. I shall not allow it on any account."

"Then come in with me; when it gets cooler, you can fan her again."

"I am going to fan Cowslip as long as I like."

When John came home a little later he was taken into Miss Letitia's confidence.

"Your aunt Deborah has one of her obstinate fits," she informed him. "She will stay and fan that cow until she drops."

"Aunt Deborah or the cow?"

"It is no joking matter. It is preposterous; a middle-aged lady on a hot August day, sitting under a sketching-umbrella, fanning a cow, and declaring that she will not be dictated to by anybody. Try if you can't make her listen to reason, John."

John obediently went out to the enclosure. "It is a pleasant day, Aunt Deborah," he began blandly.

"Very."

"A trifle warm?" he suggested.

"A trifle."

"Give me that fan. I want to try fanning Cowslip a minute."

She rose from her camp-stool and let him take her place.

"How long have you been out here?" he inquired, as he swung the fan briskly back and forth.

"Sixteen years, judging by my feelings."

"I thought so. It is six months since I came out."

"Do you think Cowslip is going to die?" Miss Deborah inquired anxiously.

"I am pretty sure, if you and I both sacrifice our lives for her sake, she won't."

"You ridiculous boy! Come, you never did like to do anything useful. Let me take my place again."

"Aunt Deborah, I am going to sit on this camp-stool and fan the cow until you promise to go into the house."

"John, don't be obstinate."

"If I am, I inherited the trait from a collateral."

"Give me that fan."

"Don't you wish you could get it?"

"John, you are behaving like a boy of ten."

"Aunt Deborah, you are behaving like a girl of six."

"Well, perhaps you are right. I don't know what has got into me to-day, but when Letitia came out in her white morning-gown, looking so cool and superior, and laughed at me in my short skirt and told me to go in, I vowed I wouldn't stir a step."

"I haven't on a white gown, and I am not cool and superior."

"There are days when Letitia sets my nerves on edge," Miss Deborah confessed. "I know it is very wrong of me, for she is always so reasonable and sweet-tempered."

"I am seldom reasonable, and only sweet-tempered by accident," John observed tranquilly. "Aunt Deborah, how long do you mean to keep me out here?"

"I advise you to go in at once."

"I shan't until you do."

"How can I allow myself to be routed by Letitia?"

"You are only being routed by me. I am not patient, and I shall begin to swear presently; you know you wouldn't like that."

"I am not so sure. It would be a relief to have somebody swear."

They walked amicably back to the house, John

promising to come out again before dinner to give Cowslip another fanning.

"I was sure John could make you listen to reason," Miss Letitia said serenely, looking up from the book she was reading in the shaded library.

Miss Deborah pressed her lips firmly together and gave her sister in pantomime behind her back, for John's benefit, the good shaking she longed to administer.

Cowslip improved. By the end of the day there seemed a fair probability of her recovery, but when Patrick came at night he thought it best not to try to move her for the present.

"I hope, Deborah, you won't think it necessary to fan her all the evening," Miss Letitia observed.

In the middle of the night Miss Deborah was dimly conscious of gusts of wind and a storm of rain beating against the house. She remembered that the entry window was wide open, and that the carpet would get soaked, but she was too tired to care. A blinding flash of lightning and an almost instantaneous peal of thunder recalled her sharply to this world.

"Cowslip!" she cried. "The poor dear will die of cold."

Forgetting her fatigue she hastily flung on her gray-and-white outing flannel wrapper, and slipping her bare feet into her rubbers, seized a couple of old

blankets and started for the front door. In the entry she paused and gave a hurried glance at the umbrella-stand. Laura Macauley's sketching umbrella was thrust like an unwilling guest in among the Wyatts' trim silk ones.

"It will spoil the looks of it," she said; "but no matter, it is in a good cause. I shall have to get her another. I suppose they are very expensive, never mind. I hope she hasn't any tender associations with it, but if she has they must go."

Hastily taking the umbrella, she unlocked the door and started for the enclosure. The blinding flashes of lightning enabled her to find her way. In the intervals of darkness she paused occasionally to rest. When Miss Deborah reached Cowslip at last, she draped the blankets over her and planted the sketching umbrella firmly in the ground. It was large enough to keep off most of the rain.

"There, poor dear, I have done my level best for you," she said. "If you die it will not be my responsibility."

Meanwhile one member after another of the Wyatt household was awakened by the peals of thunder.

"Deborah," Letitia called to her sister, "the entry window is open."

There was no answer. Deborah always looked after the windows, but as it was evident that she was

asleep Letitia rose reluctantly and went to shut it herself. The rain was beating in violently and splashed on her face and hands.

Lucy in her pale blue wrapper came softly downstairs. "I am afraid to be up in the third story all alone in this awful storm," she confessed as she sought the safe harbor of Deborah's room.

"Come in to me, dear," said Letitia.

Lucy was standing on the threshold of Deborah's door.

"Deborah isn't there," she exclaimed.

"Nonsense. Of course she is there; she is asleep."

"Come and see for yourself."

The two sisters looked at the crumpled bedclothes and at the pillow with its recent indentations, and then at each other.

"I believe she has gone out to the cow," said Letitia. "She will take her death of cold. Run down, Lucy, and see if Laura Macauley's umbrella is in the stand."

"I don't dare go. I am afraid of the lightning."

Miss Letitia went down a few steps and looked over the balusters. "It isn't there," she said.

Esther opened her door at that moment. "I want a little society," she remarked. "John is asleep. Fancy sleeping through such a thunder-storm."

"Where do you suppose your aunt Deborah is?" asked Miss Letitia.

"In bed, I hope."

"Out on the hillside with Cowslip. I don't believe she would care if she were struck and killed if only that miserable cow escaped. I wish she had as much consideration for her family as she has for animals. Now, of course, somebody will have to go out and get her in."

"I will wake John," said Esther.

Her voice made a gentle accompaniment to the storm. They could not hear what she said, although the door was ajar, but above the sound of the tempest came an exclamation in John's deep bass that sounded suspiciously like "Damn the cow."

Presently he came out, still grumbling, equipped in his oldest clothes.

"You had better take the lantern," advised Miss Letitia from her room. "The lantern is in the china-closet cupboard, the right-hand cupboard, on the middle shelf."

A terrific peal of thunder drowned the close of her remarks, and John plunged downstairs and out into the storm, trusting to the lightning to guide his steps.

"How terrible it would be if one of them should be struck," Lucy suggested with a little shiver, as she crouched down on her sister's bed. Esther went

in to see how the children and the baby were faring. They were peacefully sleeping. It took more than a little thing like a thunder-storm to wake them.

Meanwhile Miss Deborah, having fulfilled her duty in the station in life to which she had been called, was slowly making her way homeward. Her India-rubbers were filled with water, which gurgled out in cold streams on her bare feet with every step she took. She was drenched to the skin, but it was such a warm night that she enjoyed it. In fact the whole adventure was one that appealed to her daring spirit. After two or three brilliant flashes of lightning there was a period of Ethiopian darkness through which she struggled towards the beacon lights of the house. Presently a shadowy form rose at her side.

Miss Deborah had a stout heart, but the apparition of a man at midnight in her garden gave her a fright. She steadied her voice, however, and inquired sternly, "What are you doing here at this time of night when all respectable people are in their beds?"

"Upon my word I like that," answered John's voice. "What am I doing at this time of night? If *all* respectable people were in their beds I shouldn't have had this wild-goose chase, but my wife insisted on my going after you."

"I am so relieved to find it is you, John. Poor

fellow! It was a shame for them to send you out. Letitia can never learn that I am old enough to take care of myself. The cow is getting on all right. I have covered her up in two thick blankets, and put Laura Macauley's umbrella over her, and I think she——"

"Oh, confound the cow! The question is how are you getting on? It is an awful night for you to be out. You ought to have rheumatic fever or pneumonia as a sequel to this escapade."

"I have never done what was expected of me in my whole life, John, and I am not likely to begin at my age."

Miss Deborah proved a true prophet. She did not even have a cold, as the consequence of her adventure. Miss Letitia watched her carefully for two or three days for symptoms of chills-and-fever, or grippe.

"I know you are dreadfully disappointed, Letitia," Miss Deborah observed briskly. "It is hard you can't have the comfort of saying, 'I told you so. Deborah, when will you ever learn not to do such crazy things?'"

"I am thankful you haven't made yourself ill, dear," returned Miss Letitia, "but it was just as crazy a thing for you to do."

"Well, I don't care. I am as strong as a horse, and there is no reason why I should not do crazy

things. I mean to do crazier and crazier things, Letitia. I think it is time I had my fling. And I accomplished my object. Cowslip is getting well."

"I have no doubt she would have got well in any event," said Miss Letitia.

AN OLD LOVER

VI

AN OLD LOVER

“**H**ERE is your valise, Frank. I don't think I have forgotten anything.”

“Thank you, Sophy.”

“Have you got your eye-glasses?” Mrs. Hollis asked her husband presently.

“Of course I have.”

She did not remind him that he had left them behind on a former occasion.

The Reverend Francis Hollis was in that nervous state of mind that is apt to precede a journey when it is a rare event. He took out his watch. “Five minutes of three. Jones ought to be here,” he said impatiently.

“You didn't order the carriage until three,” his wife reminded him, timidly. “You must give a great deal of love to father,” she added, “and to your sister Clara and Frances, and the doctor, and to——” she hesitated. “I suppose you will see the

Wyatts?" she inquired with an assumption of carelessness.

"If I have time I shall look them up," he answered with equal indifference.

"Clara says Letitia is as handsome as ever," she ventured. "How long is it since you have seen her? It must be twenty years at least."

"It is all of that."

"She will find you very much changed."

"Changed?" He turned on her sharply.

"Yes, you have grown so much stouter, and you are getting so gray. It is very becoming to you," Mrs. Hollis hastened to add. "I never saw you looking better than you are looking this minute, I was only thinking she would find a difference. We are middle-aged people now, Frank."

He looked at his wife with her plump, matronly figure and gray hair. Sophy had never been pretty, and on the whole the years had been kind to her; she had gained more than she had lost. Still, it was true; they were middle-aged people according to the ideas of the world. He wondered that Sophy should have reminded him that he was changed. She was not usually lacking in tact, but perhaps it was too much to expect her to understand him so completely as to be able to realize that there were days when he felt like an ardent boy, in spite of his sixty years. This was one of those days. It was

not of Sophy, who had been his faithful wife for more than thirty years that he was thinking, as the carriage drew up to the door, but of a girl whose marvelous beauty had won his heart nearly forty years ago.

The Reverend Francis Hollis had been a devoted husband, according to the average standard; he had nothing to reproach himself with, he declared, as he went down the doorsteps, and yet, in all those years there had not been a time when the mere mention of this other woman's name had not quickened his pulses. Safe at the bottom of a drawer in his study was her photograph. He did not often look at it, to have done so would have seemed to him disloyal, but deep down in the bottom of his mind was the thought of her. Letitia Wyatt was the most beautiful woman he had ever known and the most gifted. Her standard had been so high that she could not think of him for a husband, but this had only set her on a more lofty pinnacle. Humility was not his chief characteristic, but he was very humble whenever he thought of Letitia Wyatt.

"Frank, aren't you going to kiss me good-by?" Sophy asked, running down the steps after him.

"I thought I had." He turned and kissed her with hasty perfunctoriness. "Don't mope while I am gone. Have a good time."

Mrs. Hollis went sadly back into the house. She sat down for a moment in the study, resting her head in her hands.

"He cares more for her than he does for me," she thought, "after all these years."

She opened a drawer and lifting up some quires of note-paper and bundles of neatly tied letters, took out from underneath them a small box containing a photograph. She had come across it accidentally once, and ever since the memory of it so carefully hidden away among her husband's possessions had haunted her. She studied the beautiful face for a long time. The dark eyes looked somberly at her with an unfathomable expression. "No wonder he loved her," she thought with a little sigh, as she put the photograph back in the box. In her youth Sophy Newhall had given Letitia Wyatt the blind adoration that a plain, humble-minded girl gives a handsome, fascinating woman, but as the years went on she had sometimes wondered whether Letitia's standard of perfection was calculated to make her friends happy in every-day life. "She could not have loved him as I have," she decided; "he would not have been happy if he had married her, but he will never know it. I love him more and more the older he grows. If he ever lives to be really old, and has any of the incapacities of age, I shall only love him a hundred times more because of

them." Something told her that this would not have been the case with Letitia Wyatt.

And meantime as the carriage was taking Mr. Hollis away from his wife, he did not once think of her. He was fond of Sophy, more so than she imagined or than he realized himself, but he was going East, and his heart was full of the exultant happiness of a schoolboy. As the train whirled him over rolling prairies and past cities lying in a cloud of smoky haze, it was of that other woman he was thinking, and of the time when he had loved her, nearly forty years ago. Day changed to night, and night gave place to day, as the train sped eastward, and at each stage of the journey the Reverend Francis Hollis left a few years of his life behind him, until by the time he reached Eppingham he was ridiculously young. When the conductor called out the familiar name with as little emotion as if he had said "Detroit," or "Boston," Mr. Hollis, who was going first to his father-in-law's farm, and would not leave the train until the next station, went out on the platform and looked eagerly to the left. The trees had grown; they made such a bower of yellow and red that he could only catch a glimpse of the Wyatts' chimneys in the distance. The village, with its white houses and two slender white spires, had changed very little in forty years. To be sure there were evidences of electric-lights and telephones,

and men and women were making their swift way on bicycles through the sleepy streets, but, although these things spoke of progress, they did little to impair the general impression of aristocratic conservatism and peaceful self-satisfaction.

When Mr. Hollis reached the Newhall farm his father-in-law was standing on the doorsteps to greet him. It was six years since they had met, a trifling space of time in the life of the octogenarian, and his son-in-law could truthfully say, "You have not changed in the least. You have learned the secret of eternal youth."

"I guess eternal age would come nearer it," said the old man. "My hair was as white as hair ever gets, six years ago. You've grown fleshy, Frank, and you are getting gray. That don't seem right in a boy like you," he added with a smile. Here was someone at last who understood that Francis Hollis's outer semblance was only a disguise.

"I suppose you will see the Wyatts when you are stopping with Clara?" Peter Newhall said after supper, as he and his son-in-law were sitting in the prim parlor that was only used on state occasions.

"I thought I should look them up."

"Lucy Wyatt was here in the summer 'long with her sister Deborah. They came to buy a cow. She's a real sweet woman, Lucy Wyatt."

"I never could forgive her for the way she treated Alec."

"I'll own I'd felt kind o' hard to her all these years," said the old man, "but when I come to talk with her and to see her with the same childlike eyes and yellow hair, but so changed in her face, and when I see the tears come into her eyes at the sound of my poor boy's name I felt different. And I thought, 'if she was to blame, I guess she's had her own punishment.' But so far as I could find out from what she didn't say—she ain't a great hand to talk—it was her folks that made the trouble. I kind o' mistrusted all along that Letitia was at the bottom of it."

"Letitia! I am sure she would never use undue influence. She is the most conscientious woman I know."

"Mebbe you're right. Conscience often makes folks interfere with other people. Not that I blame Letitia. My boy wa'n't a good match for Lucy Wyatt, according to Letitia's ideas. Only what riled me was the cold way they treated him. Well, it ain't no use crying over spilt milk. What's past is past. Letitia Wyatt is a good woman. She is a church member, and I haven't any call to find fault with her. Only, sometimes as I sit here alone and the past keeps coming up until it seems more clear than the present, I get to thinking of how it might

have been. And I say to myself, 'What is the Christian religion for? Is the church a kind of club for good people who have never sinned? Times have changed since the Lord came to save the sheep that was lost, and told the parable of the Prodigal Son. I ain't saying Lucy ought to have married my boy, though when I saw her the other day with that tired, faded look, seeming as if she had passed through life without living, I says to myself, 'Mebbe you'd have been happier here on the old farm, married to my boy, with children to look after you; you'd have had to work harder, but you'd have had an easier mind,' but that's neither here nor there. If they only treated my boy like a friend instead of the dust under their feet why then he wouldn't have gone West, and there would never have been the trouble with the other woman. But my poor lad got desperate, and he thought (I could always tell what was in his mind same as if I could look into it), it wa'n't any use trying to be a good man so long as there was the fact that he come of farmers' people to stand between him and the girl he loved."

The picture of Letitia Wyatt that the Reverend Francis Hollis had carried in his heart for so many years was not to be altered by a single detail on account of the remarks of a disappointed old man. Mr. Hollis felt sure that Letitia had used no undue

influence with Lucy. When he went to stay with his sister, Mrs. Simonds, in the village, he questioned her. Clara was very fond of Letitia, and he wanted to be reinforced in his judgment by her opinion.

"How are the Wyatts?" he asked carelessly, on the evening of his arrival.

"Deborah is always the picture of health, Lucy is never very strong, and Letitia is just getting over the grippe. You would think by the way the other two go on she had had pneumonia. I tell my husband," she added plaintively, "that I wish I had anybody to take as good care of me. I have found that doctors' wives are as badly off as shoemakers' children. You would think with a husband who is a doctor and a daughter who is meaning to be a trained nurse I might have some chance of getting medicine for my cold."

"Would Letitia be well enough to see me if I were to call there to-morrow? I want to see them all."

"I don't know. I haven't seen her go out of the house, but maybe she comes downstairs. Frances," Mrs. Simonds inquired, opening the door into the next room, "do you know whether Miss Letitia has come downstairs yet?"

"She came down yesterday for the first time."

Mrs. Simonds closed the door and returned to

her chair. Her brother found there was no use in trying to lead up to the subject. He was obliged to plunge directly in. "You never heard, did you," he began confidentially, "that Letitia had anything to do with breaking up that old affair between Lucy and Alec?"

"I don't know anything about it. I have never been intimate with Letitia. I have lived next door to Letitia Wyatt ever since we moved into this house, and that was twenty-five or twenty-six years ago, I forget which. Frances," she said opening the door again, "is it twenty-five, or twenty-six years since we moved into this house?"

"I don't know, mother, it was before I was born."

"So it was, to be sure, but I thought you might have heard your father say. I remember I was putting Ned into trousers that spring, so it must have been at least twenty-six years ago; well, it doesn't matter just when it was. What were we talking about? It has gone out of my head."

"Letitia Wyatt."

"Oh, yes. I have lived next door to her for twenty-six years, and I have never learned to know her any better than the day we moved in. She has a grand air about her that keeps one at a distance. Deborah and Lucy are so different. Mrs. Lutterworth thinks Letitia is selfish. Mrs. Lutterworth is our minister's wife,—oh, you know that, of

course, as you are going to preach for Mr. Lutterworth. Mrs. Lutterworth is one who has to have her fling at everybody. I am very fond of Letitia, I always was. I don't think it is fair to call a woman selfish merely because she has her own way. She is the oldest, and has a right to her way, and it is a very good way. I am sure the doctor has his way in this house, not that I grudge it to him; someone has to have the casting vote in every household. Mrs. Lutterworth says Deborah does all the work and Letitia criticizes, but people have different talents in this world, and Letitia makes a fine Regent of the Daughters of the Revolution. We always get on beautifully together, only I can never seem to get close to her."

When Mr. Hollis made his call at the Wyatts, he was disappointed to find that Letitia was not well enough to see him. Deborah was out, and Lucy brought down an invitation to him from Letitia to take tea with them at six o'clock the next afternoon.

"I am so glad to see you, Mr. Hollis," Lucy said, with her half shy, but wholly sincere, manner.

She was struck with the element of freshness and youth which Frank Hollis had kept. Lucy always liked boys, gray-haired or otherwise, and felt wonderfully at ease with her sister's old lover, while he, on his side, was charmed with her. They talked on general topics and neighborhood gossip for a time.

In those days when he had first fallen in love with Letitia, Lucy had been a tiny girl, a very captivating child, who had insisted that he should hold her on his knee and tell her stories. At last they began to talk of those far-away times.

"I never told stories to any child but you," he said. "Somehow they are not in my line. You gave me to understand you liked fairy-tales best, but I could never invent a fairy-tale to save my soul."

"You used to tell me delightful stories of what you did when you were a little boy."

"Did I? It seems like a fairy-tale now to think that I ever was a little boy. Youth is a good thing. I wish when we had it we ever knew how good a thing it is."

"I wish so too, with all my heart."

Alec was so strongly present in Lucy's mind that it was only by an effort that she could prevent herself from saying his name. She hastily changed the subject and spoke of Frances Simonds, and of her desire to be a trained nurse.

Mr. Hollis said that in his opinion an only daughter could find enough to do at home.

"Frances has her father's talent for medicine," said Lucy, "and I am glad she is going to lead an independent life. Her plan is to go through the training-school, and then come home to help him."

"And meanwhile her poor mother will miss her sadly."

"Yes, for two years. Someone must make a sacrifice, and why should it not be Mrs. Simonds, who has lived her life, instead of Frances, who has hers before her? I can't tell you how strongly I feel on the subject of girls asserting their individuality."

He looked at the gentle woman before him who had never in her whole life asserted hers.

"I wish you had felt like that when you were twenty," he burst out.

"Sometimes I think the sin of not daring to do, the sin of quiescence, is the greatest sin of all in the Lord's eyes," she returned impulsively.

The barriers of conventionality were down. Francis Hollis was to Lucy a voice from her lost youth, and she was to him a woman who had known sorrow and needed to be comforted.

"You must not feel like that. You have nothing to reproach yourself with," he said hastily, his past condemnation wholly forgotten.

"I reproach myself for not having been true to the best that was in me."

"You were so young, you naturally took the advice of others older and wiser than yourself."

"That does not clear me from responsibility. We cannot put our sins off on other people. I have

grown to know this lately. I gave up a friend because I hadn't the courage to be loyal to him."

"Poor Alec! He hadn't the strength of will to be true to you, but he always loved you dearly."

They were interrupted by the ringing of a bell. That bell seemed to Lucy like the symbol of her whole life. She started to her feet, Bridget was out and Letitia needed her.

"Wait a minute," Mr. Hollis said peremptorily. "We shall never have such a chance as this again. There is so much I want to tell you. Letitia won't mind if you go up five minutes later."

She hesitated and looked uneasily at the clock.

"I was going to say that Sophy took care of her brother in his last illness, and he spoke so often of you, of what you had been to him, and of what he might have been if you had loved him. I am not trying to excuse him, he made a terrible fiasco of life, poor fellow, but in his defence it can be said——"

The bell sounded again. This time there were three quick impatient rings.

"I must go to Letitia," she said.

"I thought he never would leave," Letitia complained as Lucy entered the room. "It seems he doesn't know when to go any better than he used to. He has been here forty minutes by the clock. I didn't suppose he would stay when he found I

couldn't see him, especially as we asked him to tea to-morrow. I ought to have had my eggnog at four and it is twenty minutes past. I would not have rung for you, but I began to feel really faint, and hopeless as to his ever going. What did you talk about?"

"Oh, the weather, and politics and the neighbors, and about Frances being a trained nurse."

"Well, run along now, and make me my eggnog."

When Lucy brought it up fluffy with the lightly beaten egg, her sister said, "You are very good to do this for me, dear. I like your eggnogs better than Bridget's; they are lighter."

She tasted it. "It is perfectly delicious, only I should say that you forgot the salt."

"I did," Lucy owned ruefully. "I'll run down and get it."

"Never mind. I don't want to wait. It is very good without the salt. I merely reminded you of it for another time. Tell me, is Frank Hollis very much changed?" she asked, when her hunger was appeased.

"He has grown stout and gray, and he is rather bald, but he seemed just the same person inside."

"Inside? What a strange girl you are!"

"I mean that his being gray and middle-aged seems an accident. He is young at heart."

"If there is one thing that I dislike more than another, it is your young, middle-aged person," said Letitia. "It is a great deal more dignified to adapt oneself to the inevitable. I have been making my plans for to-morrow night. Deborah is so set she will be sure to oppose me, and we shall have to use a great deal of tact. I do wish she would consent to let me get pink shades for the candlesticks; however, our candlesticks are not just the right kind for them. I want Frank Hollis to see that we have not stood still while the world has moved, and I am going to borrow Laura Macauley's candlesticks and pink shades."

"Mr. Hollis is the most informal sort of person," Lucy affirmed. "I don't believe he would care or even notice how the table looked."

"He would take in the general effect. I want quail on toast for tea. Deborah does not care for quail, but they are the proper thing. Laura always has them, and I am very fond of quail. We will get half a dozen, and then there will be two left that you and I can have for our dinner the next day. Here comes Deborah. Be sure to back me up, dear."

Deborah stoutly refused to borrow Laura Macauley's candlesticks.

"The idea of making a splurge for Frank Hollis!" she exclaimed. "It is absurd! And as for

having quail on toast for tea, men never like such light fare. He would a great deal rather have cold beef and baked potatoes."

Letitia had her way in the end, as usual, but it was only after a wearing discussion, and she was obliged to despatch Lucy to the Macauleys' for the candlesticks.

When the long-expected hour came, and Frank Hollis entered his old friend's house, with the delightful prospect of a whole evening spent in her society, it was Deborah who greeted him, for Letitia had not yet come down. It was a chilly day, and all the windows were closed in the cheerful parlor, and a fire was burning on the hearth. The room felt close, and Mr. Hollis glanced involuntarily at the thermometer, which stood at seventy-six.

"It is frightfully hot," Deborah observed sympathetically. "I will open the windows wide for a moment. Letitia and I are like Jack Sprat and his wife. She does not like a breath of air, and I feel as if I were going to have an attack of apoplexy without it. As I have never had one, and as she has frequently taken cold, we keep the windows shut. Frank, don't sit down in that chair, that is Mr. Gray's." Then, as he looked mystified, she added: "Mr. Gray is our parlor boarder, and the chief ruler of the family. We have to keep an especial

chair for him, for his gray hairs are not fastened in as firmly as mine are. Come here, Mr. Gray, and let me introduce you to an old friend," and she took her cat up from the hearth-rug and gave his paw gravely to Frank Hollis. "Here comes Letitia," she added presently. "Shut the windows, quick, Frank."

How often he had listened in this very room to those light footsteps on the stairs which had been the prelude to the entrance of the most beautiful girl he had ever known. He could see her now with her dark eyes and glorious dark hair, and her tall graceful figure. He remembered vividly the occasional haughty inclination of her head which was more than counterbalanced by her charming smile.

"I am so glad to see you, Mr. Hollis," Letitia said, as she shook hands with him cordially.

For one moment her hair so thickly streaked with gray and her colorless complexion gave him a sharp sense of pain; after that he was ready to admit that she was still a handsome woman. She had the same slender figure, and if the haughty inclination of her head seemed to be more habitual with her than when she was a girl, and the smile to have grown less frequent, it was no less gracious when it came.

"Haven't the windows been opened in this

room?" was Letitia's first question. She fixed her eyes on guilty Deborah.

"Only for a minute."

"I feel the dampness. I am sorry to be so troublesome, but I shall have to ask you to put on another stick of wood and to get me my white Chud-dah shawl."

Lucy came in just then, and after a few minutes they went out into the dining-room. Mr. Hollis was struck by the modern air of the table, with the four silver candlesticks and their pink shades, while the lettuce with a French dressing and the quail on toast were an equal surprise to him. He was very hungry, and felt obtrusively masculine as he seated himself between Letitia and Deborah, and tried to assume an indifference to food that he did not feel. As the meal proceeded it was evident to the Reverend Francis Hollis that there was to be nothing noteworthy in his conversation with Letitia until they were alone. Deborah did most of the talking, and with her ready wit and piquant figures of speech was always amusing. He wondered she had never impressed him more in the old days.

"Will you have another quail?" Miss Deborah asked him, when a discussion on Anti-Imperialism had begun to languish.

Something in Letitia's expression warned him that Deborah's question had been indiscreet, and

that he ought to reply in the negative, but as there were two more on the platter and he was accustomed to a late dinner, he found himself saying, "I will. I feel very apologetic, bringing my man's appetite in among all you ladies."

"Frank, you are a great comfort to me," said Miss Deborah. "I have a man's appetite myself, and quail never satisfies it, but I couldn't ask for cold beef for myself alone. Bridget, please bring in some slices of cold beef for Mr. Hollis and me."

Letitia's face told him plainly that he would write himself out of her good books if he helped himself to cold beef; nevertheless he went boldly over to Deborah's side. He remembered one or two occasions in their childhood when he and Deborah had been partners in scrapes, long before he had fallen in love with Letitia. Letitia, he remembered, had been rather an aggravating little girl. Frank and Deborah joked merrily and talked of their childhood as they ate the cold beef. It seemed symbolical of hearty good cheer and lack of pretension. He was sure that those candlesticks with their pink shades had never emanated from Deborah's brain. Letitia had grown silent. She delicately played with her salad and toyed with her quail. He knew she was displeased with him. Letitia's silence had always been a more formidable weapon than the open anger of other women. How handsome she

looked! She had a little color now, and he was beginning to like her gray hair.

When tea was over the sisters slipped away one at a time, just as they had done in the old days when there had been twice as many of them, and Francis Hollis found himself alone with Letitia. He longed to get close to her inner self, and to know what the years, that on the whole had been kinder to him than he deserved, had brought her, but she continued to keep him at arm's length. He had never felt near her, even when his love was the greatest, but then he had supposed this was because of his inferiority. Now he was puzzled. Those beautiful eyes with their unfathomable expression suggested a deep nature. He felt that she was too reserved to confide in anyone; and that she had passed through childhood and youth to middle-age, a solitary figure, asking neither advice nor sympathy.

They discussed recent literature for a time, but merely grazed the outside of things. Then they spoke of old friends, in a conventional way. At last by devious paths he brought the conversation back to their youth.

"Those were the good days," he stated. "I never see a young man just starting out in life that I don't feel a great sense of envy."

"I see no reason to regret youth," said Letitia,

leaning back gracefully, and drawing her white shawl about her. "Youth is a time of strain and stress, when we long for the impossible. As we grow older, if we are moderately unselfish, we find our interest centering in other people. Middle-age is a far more restful time of life."

"You were always reasonable, Letitia. For myself, I would give anything in the world to be young again."

"I can understand feeling so if one has wasted one's opportunities, but when people have done useful work in the world and have as little to regret as you and I have, why is not one period of life as satisfying as another?"

"Why?" he cried sharply. "Because men and women never enjoy the limitations of age. They merely accept them and try to make the best of them. It is all very well for us now, but ten or twenty years hence how will it be? Do you mean to tell me in serious earnest that you would as lief be seventy as seventeen?"

"I can't tell how I shall feel at seventy. I only know that I have never come to the time yet when life has not seemed desirable."

The precious moments were slipping by, and Francis Hollis still had that baffled feeling.

"By the way, how is your father-in-law?" Letitia asked presently. "I always liked old Mr. New-

hall. He is an example of what a contented period old age may be, and yet he has had his trials."

"Yes. I have often wished," he added impulsively, "that his greatest trial had been spared him. I wish your sister Lucy had married Alec. She would have been the making of him."

"You wish my sister Lucy had married a man like Alec Newhall?" Miss Letitia lost all her indifference and sat up very straight, her eyes bright, a delicate color in her cheeks."

"Yes. It was because he thought she had been playing with him that he grew reckless."

"I do not agree with you. A man who was so weak would have shown his weakness after marriage. I have never ceased to thank Providence for my sister's fortunate escape. There are some things no woman can ever forgive."

Miss Letitia disliked even to touch on so delicate a topic. She thought it in extremely poor taste for Francis Hollis to have introduced the subject.

"I cannot even understand a man like Alec Newhall," she said coldly.

"No," said Frank Hollis slowly, "I don't suppose you can."

In that moment with a flash of revelation, he realized the narrowness of a woman's point of view when she is shut away from any vital contact with the world. He had a mad desire to tell Letitia

Wyatt a few brutal facts. She had gone placidly through life with eyes closed to its real significance. He did not go so far as to wonder if he had overestimated her in the old days; her personal charm was too great for that, but he was sure her stagnant existence had failed to develop her best powers. Had she married him and led the active life of the wife of a minister, having every gift she possessed brought in play, as had been the case with Sophy, she would have been a more sympathetic woman now. And yet he could not imagine her engaging in all the homely drudgery that had fallen to Sophy's lot, and neither could he fancy her comforting the sick and fallen, getting close to the hearts of the humblest and most sinful men and women.

Letitia glanced surreptitiously at the clock. It was a quarter of ten. She had not sat up so late since her illness. She began to realize that the evening had been a strain, and wished that Deborah or Lucy would come to her assistance. "So few men know when they have stayed long enough," was her mental comment.

"It has been the greatest pleasure to see you, Frank," she said, hoping that he would take this as a hint to go. "I trust that it will not be another twenty years before we meet, but if it is I think I can promise to show you how happy one can be at eighty."

"I fancy you will always be contented, Letitia."

"It is no credit to me. I am fortunate in inheriting my mother's disposition."

He rose. "I have enjoyed the evening extremely. It has been so good to see you again. You have changed very little in twenty years."

Letitia wished that she could return the compliment. In her heart of hearts she did not wonder that Francis Hollis disliked growing old. It must be a great trial to be so stout and bald.

Hearing the front door open Deborah and Lucy came to bid their guest good-night. Deborah dashed madly forward and seized her cat just as he was about to make a bold strike for freedom and slip unobserved through the door.

"Letitia Wyatt!" she exclaimed. "If I hadn't been here you would have let Mr. Gray out, and heaven only knows whether he ever would have come back. I don't see how you can be so thoughtless."

She took up the cat and stroked him lovingly.

"Dear, good old friends," Mr. Hollis said to himself, as he closed their hospitable door. "It has been a pleasure to see them again."

Nevertheless it was a relief to get out into the broader atmosphere of a man's world.

And if his journey East had been undertaken with

the enthusiasm of a schoolboy, and his return was made in the chastened frame of mind of middle-age, there were compensations. He was going home to dear Sophy.

A NEIGHBORHOOD ROMANCE

VII

A NEIGHBORHOOD ROMANCE

“MY brother, Mark Henderson, is coming to stay with me next week,” Mrs. Lutterworth announced to the reading-club.

The reading-club tried to look properly sympathetic, but they had heard of the intended visits of this brother so many times that they had grown sceptical. The Reverend Ezra Lutterworth and his wife had been settled in Eppingham for seven years. Mr. Henderson had come, in the early days of his brother-in-law's pastorate, intending to stay a week, but had been unexpectedly called away at the end of forty-eight hours, and although his sister had urged a repetition of the visit every summer, he was sure to find some good reason for not coming, and contented himself instead with joining the Lutterworths at the seashore for a part of their vacation. This year, however, he was going to Europe for six months, and his sister had peremptorily insisted on the visit.

"Ladies," she said, "what on earth I am going to do with Mark on my hands for a whole week I don't know. He is the kind of man who requires an enormous amount of amusement, and then he is used to his glass of wine every day, and Mr. Lutterworth, as you know, will not allow wine in his house."

"And he is entirely right," said Miss Deborah Wyatt staunchly.

"Oh, of course he is right, but being brought up as I was in a house where wine flowed as freely as water I can see Mark's side too. I want him to realize how delightful Eppingham is," she continued. "You know he has never really stayed here and he fancies——"

"It is easy to see what he fancies," broke in Miss Letitia Wyatt, "from the fact that he has never repeated his visit."

"Does he like dancing?" Laura Macauley asked. "I have been longing to give a dancing-party ever since we have widened our piazza. It would be so charming hung with Japanese lanterns."

"He used to delight in dancing, but Mark is getting on now. Let me see, he must be thirty-six. Mark is an irresponsible sort of person who never means to marry," Mrs. Lutterworth went on, shattering the castles in the air that the older women were building for their young friends. "He has led a roving life and enjoys it. He is a delightful

companion, a thoughtless, careless sort of fellow, but somehow you can never be angry with him."

"I haven't the least idea he will come," said Laura Macauley, as she and Frances Simonds walked along together after the club, "but I am going to have my party just the same. I invite you now, Frances."

"Thank you. I hate parties, because I dance so badly."

"You must come just the same, if it is only to look on."

Mrs. Lutterworth herself was surprised when her brother actually arrived on Thursday evening, only two days later than he had planned.

"Sally," he said, giving his sister an affectionate hug, "it is awfully good to see you."

Mrs. Lutterworth was never called Sally by anyone else; she was surprised to find how much she liked it. The name seemed a part of her gay, careless youth.

"You manage to live without me pretty comfortably for long periods," she observed drily.

"Ah, Sally, you don't know the agony I suffer," he exclaimed melodramatically.

"Get along with you, you silly boy! I believe you will never grow up. By the way, there is a kind young lady who is going to give a dancing-party for you."

"A dancing-party for me! Well, I declare! Dew tell, as you say in this part of the world. I want ter know!"

"She is giving it partly for you, and partly to show off her new piazza. And we talk very correctly in this part of the world I must tell you. *We* are intelligent. We read Darwin and Herbert Spencer."

"The deuce you do! I beg your pardon, Sally. You don't mean to say I've got to go to this confounded party, do you, in this hot weather? You allow people to say 'confound it,' don't you? under this Evangelical roof? To think that you, of all people, Sally, should have married a parson."

"Of course you've got to go to it. It comes off to-morrow night, and all Eppingham will be present, the old and middle-aged as well as the young. I assure you a dancing-party is a rare thing in Eppingham, and no consideration of age keeps us at home. Those of us whose dancing days are over look on and watch the others.

"I'll look on and watch the others," he declared.

"Your dress really looks very nice, Frances," Mrs. Simonds observed to her daughter on the evening of the party. "Ned," she said to her son, "did you ever see Frances look so well?"

Ned gazed at his sister in the critical manner of brothers.

"She does have more style than usual," he admitted.

"It is all on account of those dear Wyatts," Frances informed him. "Miss Lucy fairly insisted I should have a new gown. She chose this for me, and they all helped me make it."

"I thought lilac was much too old for Frances," Mrs. Simonds remarked in her usual plaintive tones, "but Lucy said the color suited her complexion, and that she was young enough to carry it off. Good-by, dear. Have a good time."

"I don't expect to have a good time, mother. You know I am always a wall-flower, but I have made up my mind not to stay away from things on that account. One can get some fun just from looking on."

"To think that I should have a daughter like you," mourned Mrs. Simonds. "When I was a girl I used to dance every dance, and I had to divide most of them; but you are just like your father. It seems as if it was more than I could bear that you have made up your mind to be a trained nurse."

Frances waved a good-by to her mother. She was in high spirits, and amused her brother on the way to the Macauleys' with an imaginary conversation between herself and the lion of the evening.

"Frances, why is it you never have a word to say to any of the fellows who come to the house, when you talk like a blue streak when we are by ourselves?" Ned asked her.

"I'm scared."

"Scared! And yet you are planning to be a trained nurse!"

"I'm afraid of young men. I think by the time I am fifty I shall begin to enjoy life."

Ned Simonds was a sufficiently good brother to ask his sister to waltz, although he knew she did not waltz well, but his magnanimity was not great enough to bear in silence the contretemps that happened, for, owing to her difficulty in reversing, they stumbled against Mr. Henderson, who was dancing with Laura Macauley, and after a fearful moment of uncertainty found themselves reclining on the highly polished floor.

"I'm ashamed of you," her brother said, in tones that reached the other couple. "If I hadn't supposed you could do better than that I wouldn't have asked you."

Henderson's chivalrous soul protested against such a public castigation. He turned to look at the victim. "No one but a brother could talk like that," he observed to his partner.

"Yes, he is her brother. I can't think how she came to be so stupid."

The situation interested Henderson, and when the waltz was over, he contrived to seat his partner next to Frances.

"You don't care," Ned was saying. "You don't mind making me the laughing-stock of everybody, to say nothing of yourself."

"Of course I care," she protested. "You don't suppose I did it on purpose to amuse myself; but I don't think it is worth while to say anything more about it. It isn't as if I had committed a crime."

"Is there anyone you would like me to present you to?" Ned Simonds asked Henderson suavely later in the evening.

"Yes, I should like to be introduced to the girl in lilac."

"My sister?" he inquired in surprise. "She isn't a good dancer, as you may have noticed."

"I want to apologize to her for having been so clumsy as to knock her down."

"Oh, but it was entirely her fault. She isn't used to reversing."

"I ought to have been quick enough to get out of the way."

Frances, in her corner behind the palms, was looking out on life with that keen expression of interest and amused comprehension that went far to redeem the plainness of her face. A party was to her a world in miniature, where character showed

itself with surprising distinctness. There was Miss Lucy, in a pale gray silk gown, crushed into a corner, and when she was at last discovered, passing on her plate of salad and croquettes to Mrs. Simonds. Miss Letitia, on the other hand, who was commandingly in evidence, gave up her plate for quite a different reason, demanding creamed halibut with her salad instead of croquettes. As for her dear Miss Deborah she had joined the ranks of the men and gone boldly to the dining-room, returning with two well-filled plates, one destined for Letitia, the other for Lucy.

"My sister, Miss Simonds, Mr. Henderson."

The words seemed to come to Frances from that land of mocking fantasy where she and her brother had been sojourning on their way to the Macauleys'. She looked up and saw Mr. Henderson's tall, slight figure looming above her, and his laughing dark eyes looking down at her.

"Miss Simonds," a pleasant voice said, "I've been telling your brother I owe you an apology for my stupidity earlier in the evening. Won't you let me make it out on the piazza? It is stifling here. It would be such a pity if Miss Macauley's new piazza wasn't appreciated. Let me find a seat for you and I will get something for you to eat."

He had the easy assurance of a man of the world, and Frances soon found herself talking to him as

unaffectedly as she talked to her brother. She did not altogether like Mr. Henderson, but he amused her. After a time she said, "I wish I knew what you think of us—of Eppingham, I mean, we must bore you so."

"Miss Simonds, let me confide to you that I have never been bored for more than quarter of an hour at a time in my whole life."

She laughed merrily. "I can quite believe you. My brother could say the same. Whenever, through any chain of untoward circumstances, bores come to our house, Ned vanishes. I can't say I have never been bored for more than quarter of an hour. He goes, and I stay."

"And you think I am like your brother?"

"I am sure of it."

"Miss Simonds, you have unusual penetration."

"I have so much penetration that I am going to ask you to take me into the house to Miss Lucy Wyatt. I want to leave you before the quarter of an hour is up."

He laughed. She was refreshingly original. "If you want to get rid of me, Miss Simonds, you are not going about it in the right way," he observed. "The music is beginning. I shall not be satisfied until you have given me a waltz."

"No," she said, at once shrinking into her shell. "I can't do that."

"You not only can, but you will, for you owe it to me to make public amends for my awkwardness."

"Your awkwardness!" she said with a gay little laugh.

Henderson was as good a dancer as Ned Simonds, and he had greater patience. Frances did not reverse easily, but she was pliable, and quick to fall in with his suggestions; the result was that they made the tour of the parlor twice with every outward appearance of success, giving the impression that the accident earlier in the evening might have happened to anyone. When the dance was over Frances asked to be left next Miss Lucy Wyatt.

"Miss Lucy, can you go to drive with me to-morrow afternoon to get wild-flowers to arrange at church?" Frances asked, as Mr. Henderson was borne off by Miss Macauley to be introduced to Bertha Hall, a dark-eyed girl who was resplendent in a low-necked gown.

"I shall be very glad to go, dear. How beautifully you waltz," was the comforting remark of this always tactful friend.

Greatly to the surprise of Frances, Mr. Henderson came back before the evening was over, and proposed that she should take a turn with him through the garden. "It is a pity to waste such a night, other people are out there," he said, looking towards a group of light dresses with the usual smaller

sprinkling of black coats. Frances was so much amused to find herself walking in the garden with the hero of the evening that she could not refrain from giving her brother a mischievous glance as they passed him. She found Ned's face an interesting study.

"This is much better than that hot room," Henderson said, as they sat down on a bench. "I am afraid my dancing days are over."

"Mine have never begun. I hate parties, but that is only because I am not suited to them."

"What do you like?"

"Things you would find very stupid."

"I am interested in nearly everything."

"I like making bandages, and giving medicine, and dressing wounds," she said demurely. "That is my idea of having a thoroughly good time. I am going into a hospital next winter."

"Dear me! How you must enjoy life! If little trifles of that sort mean a good time to you, how overwhelmingly delightful you must find the great pleasures of life."

"What is your idea of a thoroughly good time?" she asked.

"You will despise me when I tell you. It is doing nothing, in a heavenly place with a congenial companion. Drifting about in a gondola in Venice, for instance, or gliding over the Italian Lakes, or, I

might even like driving through these country roads."

"I will tell Mrs. Lutterworth. I have no doubt Mr. Lutterworth will take you with him when he makes some of his distant parish calls."

He looked at her to see if she were in earnest.

"I did not have my brother-in-law in mind," he informed her. "I was thinking how pleasant it would be if you and the lady with the yellow hair, Miss—— I forget her name."

"Miss Lucy Wyatt."

"Oh, yes. I thought if you would invite me to go after wild-flowers with you to-morrow, it would be what I should like."

"I am so glad. I have always wanted to take somebody with us who would get out and pick the flowers. Now if you go, I can sit in the carriage with Miss Lucy while you do all the work. I will get father to let me have the carryall, and perhaps Mrs. Lutterworth would like to come too."

"Well, Frances, did you have a good time?" Mrs. Simonds asked, coming out of her bedroom as Frances and Ned went by the door.

"Yes. Mr. Henderson was very devoted. He waltzed with me and took me out into the garden."

"Don't joke, dear. It makes me so unhappy to

know the things didn't really happen. Did you have a very stupid time?"

"Ask Ned if I am joking."

"He really did devote himself to her most of the evening. They got on like a breeze. I can't think what has come over her."

"He invited himself to go after wild flowers with Miss Lucy and me to-morrow," Frances announced. "It shows how hard up he is for amusement, poor man."

The next afternoon Miss Letitia and Miss Deborah watched the little party drive off with feelings of the truest interest and keenest satisfaction.

"I do wish that pleasant fellow would take a fancy to Frances," Miss Deborah said to her sister.

"My dear, she isn't at all the sort of girl men fall in love with."

"I know it. It only shows how little sense they have."

"I am glad she is enjoying herself for once in her life like other girls. It will do her good," said Miss Letitia.

When Lucy came back at night her sisters questioned her eagerly.

"Is Mr. Henderson as delightful as he looks?" Miss Letitia asked.

"Yes. He and Frances sat on the front seat, so we didn't have much talk with him. I never saw

Frances in such good spirits. She did not seem in the least afraid of him. I thought she was going to insist on his picking the swamp honeysuckle without any help, but she relented. In one place we all got out and tied the horse. It was a glorious afternoon. They are planning a picnic for Monday, just a little one. You would both of you like to go, wouldn't you?"

"I should," said Miss Deborah.

"Are all the Lutterworth children going?" inquired Miss Letitia.

"I think so."

"Heaven preserve us! I dislike a crowd of children, and I am not fond of eating my meals out-of-doors, but if you are both going I don't want to be left behind."

The day of the picnic Mr. Henderson conducted himself in such a way as to give a subject for conversation to his sister and Miss Letitia Wyatt. He appropriated Frances as calmly as if she had been an old friend, and ignored both Laura Macauley and Bertha Hall. When Frances took two of the Lutterworth children into the woods to get ferns, he followed, and whatever she did he contrived to be near her.

"Your brother seems to have taken a great fancy to Frances," Miss Letitia began, when she and Mrs. Lutterworth were left on the hillside together.

"My brother is always taking a great fancy to some girl. He has no more sense of responsibility, or the fitness of things than a small boy. If he likes a woman he sees no reason why he should not be with her sixteen hours out of the twenty-four. I should have to take him to task if he were going to stay longer, but his week will be up on Thursday."

When Mrs. Lutterworth discovered that her brother intended to prolong his visit, she felt it necessary to speak to him plainly.

"Mark," she began, "I always did dislike to interfere with your pleasures, but I must tell you that it isn't fair for you to monopolize a girl as you have been doing the last week. I know you don't care anything for her, and that it is only your way of passing the time, but how can she know it? And if she does, other people do not. She has never had attention and your devotion is enough to turn any girl's head."

"Don't be absurd, Sally. Miss Simonds has a head that is firmly fastened on her shoulders. She is going into a hospital next winter. This is positively her last chance to amuse herself. She is getting a little knowledge of the world through me. It may be useful to her later."

"I don't see why you like her so much. She is a good girl, and amusing, when you know her well,

but she isn't pretty, or charming, or especially clever."

"She is perfectly natural and unaffected. She treats me as if I were a comrade, not a possible admirer, that is why I like her, and she is delightfully unexpected. I never know what she is going to say next."

"I think you ought to realize, Mark, that people are beginning to talk."

"Let them talk if they like. Conversation is cheap."

"Her mother seems to think you may be in earnest."

"Her mother is a fool."

"That is perfectly true, but it isn't becoming in you to say so. I never suspected that Frances would condescend to indulge in a summer flirtation."

"A flirtation? Is that what you call it?" He threw back his head and laughed. "I never was talked to so plainly by anyone in my life. A sister isn't a circumstance. Miss Simonds seems to have discovered every hidden fault I have."

"I can give you plenty of conversation in the same line, if that is what you like."

"She is so amusing about it. She is as refreshing as the east wind. We are going up the mountain to-morrow. Her brother and Miss Macauley are coming too."

"Well, I wash my hands of you. I have given you warning. It isn't any affair of mine."

It was just a week later that Mrs. Lutterworth found it necessary to speak to her brother again.

"When are you going home, Mark?" she inquired bluntly. "Of course I am delighted to have you stay until you sail, if you are contented here, but I am expecting other guests, and you must give me some idea when I can have your room."

"I thought I would stay another week if you will keep me, but I can go to the hotel."

"I think I see myself letting you go to the hotel! Mark, I wish you would go home to-morrow, for the sake of Miss Simonds."

"For the sake of Miss Simonds I would much rather stay here."

"You have no idea how people are talking; on one side you are called a desperate flirt, and are said to be on the road to breaking her heart, on the other you are supposed to be engaged to her."

"I wish I were. If you will keep me a week longer I hope I shall be."

"Mark!" It was twilight, and Mrs. Lutterworth could not see her brother's expression. "Mark," she repeated, going over to him and taking his hand, "you are not in earnest?"

He put his head down on her shoulder as he used

to do when he was a boy, and gave her cool hand a hot pressure.

"I am in earnest," he said simply.

"Mark Henderson, you don't mean that you, irresponsible as the wind, you, who have said over and over again that you should never marry, because you had never seen a woman you would not tire of in six weeks, you don't mean to tell me you are thinking of marrying a country girl with neither beauty, nor charm, nor money?"

"I mean it, Sally. I mean that I have seen the woman I shall not tire of in six weeks."

"You will regret it," she said vehemently. "You will live to be bitterly sorry you ever took such a step."

"Perhaps I shall regret it. I have regretted most things I have done. I am only sure I can't let her go. I should be a different man with her. She is so staunch and true, so loyal, and best of all," he added with a little smile, "she has such a sense of humor. Fancy what it would be to me, Sally, to go through life with someone who would understand all my jokes."

"I believe if you were dying you would make a joke of it," she said severely. "I beg you won't do anything in a hurry. Promise me that you will go to Europe without telling her how you feel. Write to her while you are gone, if you like, but don't com-

mit yourself. You will see things differently when you get away from Eppingham. It is only that you have had so little to do here."

"Sally, I am going to ask her to marry me. Nothing you say will make any difference."

The sun was setting, and the river was gray and gold. The firs stood out sharply against the gold of the sky. It was a cool evening suggesting October rather than June, just the evening for a walk, Mrs. Lutterworth said, and she proposed to her husband and brother that they should ask Miss Simonds to go with them. They had taken the walk, and Mrs. Lutterworth had at last succeeded in making Mr. Lutterworth go home with her. They left the two young people sitting on one of the seats that ran along the sides of the bridge. Mr. Lutterworth could see no reason why he should not stay with them. Their society was congenial to him and he was in no hurry to go home; when his wife reminded him that his sermon was unfinished he turned on her reproachfully, wondering how she could forget that he never wrote in the evening.

"Do stay with us, Mr. Lutterworth," Frances begged.

Mark said nothing.

Mr. Lutterworth was irresolute. It had ended by

his wife's drawing her arm firmly through his and turning him towards home.

"Ezra," she said, as soon as they were out of hearing, "your sex are all stupid, but you are positively the most stupid member of it, for a clever man, that I ever came across. Didn't you see that Mark had something especial he wanted to say to Frances?"

Mr. Lutterworth had seen nothing, and could hardly believe it when told in plain words. Mrs. Lutterworth had forgotten that her own surprise had been equally great a week ago. She looked back with wistful envy at the two figures outlined against the evening sky. She loved a romance. Her marriage had hardly come under that head, and so many years of monotonous living had intervened since the evening when Ezra had asked her to be his wife that, in the retrospect, the occasion seemed more matter-of-fact than it was. She had never felt for her husband the irresistible attraction that drew her to her brother. She could not help reflecting with a sigh what an ideal lover Mark would make. It seemed a pity such romantic possibilities should be wasted on a prosaic girl like Frances Simonds. Mrs. Lutterworth glanced furtively over her shoulder once or twice. The two figures were still side by side. Frances's white waist stood out from its dark surroundings. Mrs. Lutterworth found

herself hoping Frances would dress better when she was Mark's wife. How could he, who was so fastidious, have fallen in love with a girl for whom evening dress was half the time represented by a clean shirt-waist?

"Well, Mark, is it all settled?" his sister asked when he came into the house. Then she looked up and noticed his haggard face.

"You don't mean to tell me——" she began.

"She doesn't care for me. She never had the least idea I was in earnest."

"That isn't strange, when you never were in earnest before."

Mark sank wearily into a chair. He was thinking of the just but altogether intolerable punishments in life.

"She will care for you by and by," his sister assured him. "No girl could help it. It is only that this is the first time the idea has entered her mind."

He shook his head. "She says her one interest in life is to be a trained nurse."

"Trained fiddlesticks!" Mrs. Lutterworth exclaimed contemptuously. "That is the way all girls talk until they fall in love."

"She told me, too, that I was not at all the man she could care for. I was not enough in earnest. Well, perhaps she is right, but it is a little hard on me."

A romance was such a rare thing in Eppingham that all the ladies in town felt a personal interest in this one. There had been nothing more pronounced than mild flirtations among the aristocracy since John Forsyth's marriage to Esther Norris, but that was only a pale affair compared to the present exciting drama, for no one had suspected John's engagement until it was an accomplished fact, whereas now it was rumored on every side that Mark Henderson had offered himself to Frances Simonds. Rumor became certainty for the Miss Wyatts when Mrs. Lutterworth came over one evening in the greatest excitement.

"I shall go crazy if I don't tell somebody what has happened," she began, breathlessly. "You three are the only women in the parish who can keep a secret. Mark has offered himself to Frances, and she has refused him!"

"No!"

"Is it possible?"

"You don't mean so!"

"It is true. I have talked to her like a mother and sister, but I can't make the slightest impression on her. She only sees her side of the question. She wants to be a nurse and help her father."

"It seems incredible that so plain a girl should have such an exceptionally good offer," said Miss Letitia, "and still more preposterous that she should

refuse it. Your brother is rich, well-connected and charming. What more can she ask for?"

"She says she never could care for an idle man, as if mere work were the only thing to live for. I have no patience with her. What do you think, Miss Deborah?"

"I am sure she is making a great mistake."

"I wish you would talk to her. You could influence her, if anyone can. She isn't in the least the person I should have chosen for my brother, but I never knew him so upset by anything."

"Frances," Miss Deborah began abruptly, the next time she and the girl took a walk together, "Mrs. Lutterworth tells me that you have refused her brother."

Frances gave a little gasp. "I don't know why she should have told you," she said stiffly.

"No more do I, my dear, but she did. Now, I want to know why you were so foolish. I always thought you were a sensible girl."

"I had good reasons."

"In other words, it isn't any of my business. That is true, except that I am more fond of you than of any young girl I know, and I don't want to see you making a mistake."

Her old friend's eyes were so full of honest affection that Frances was softened.

"I have never regretted my life," Miss Deborah

continued. "It has been best for me, but I don't think there is one woman in a hundred who is happier unmarried. I have always been thankful I didn't have a husband. It is bad enough to get yourself through life without having a man tagging along whom you've got to lift over all the hard places."

"That is just the way I feel. As we agree so well, why do you think I am making a mistake?"

"Your case is different. You haven't sisters to make a home for when you are old, and you and your brother care for such different things that you could never live together, and then I was too prone to see the ridiculous ever to have a love-affair. Men, it must be confessed, are all amusing."

"Women are amusing, too."

"Yes, but women are light comedy, whereas men are broad farce."

"I didn't know what the trouble was before, but I suspect I have too much sense of humor to fall in love."

"Frances, I am going to talk to you seriously for the first, and probably the last time in my life. When we are young we feel certain we are always going to have plain sailing, and age seems as impossible to believe in as death. I have no doubt you are sure you are going to make the best trained nurse in the hospital, that you'll have a straight road to suc-

cess, with no pitfalls. You are certain that you are going to help your father, and that you two can show the world what a man and woman can do when they work together. Isn't that about it?"

"Yes, only I know there will be hard places."

"Well, when you have lived to be my age you will find things never turn out as you expect. You may catch all the diseases in the hospital, and discover after six months that you don't want to be a trained nurse, not that that is probable, for you are made of the right stuff, or, just as you are through the training-school your father may die. Trained-nursing, at best, is a profession you can only keep on with for a few years. The founding of a home and the bringing up of children is the best profession for women; it is the natural one. Anything else is only best in special cases. Yours is not a special case. Do you not feel Mark Henderson's charm? It seems so unnatural that a young girl shouldn't. I feel it, old as I am."

Frances hesitated. "Yes, I feel it up to a certain point," she owned at last. "All that is most frivolous and worldly in me is charmed. If it were merely the question of a summer vacation; if it were the custom for men and women who were only friends to travel together like brother and sister for a few months I can think of no one who would be a more amusing companion. But

for all my life!" She shivered. "For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer! Miss Deborah, how do women ever make up their minds to do it? Surely you could never advise a girl to marry unless she were deeply in love, and felt in addition respect for the man who wanted to marry her?"

"No, Frances, I couldn't, but it seems a great pity; it would be such a good match, and he is so attractive. I can't help hoping you will change your mind."

It was given to Lucy to put the crowning touch to the arguments in favor of Frances becoming engaged to Mark Henderson. Lucy and Frances had taken a long drive in search of wild-flowers. Lucy could not get her courage up sufficiently to broach the subject until they were half way home, and even then she led up to it by halting approaches. She went over at first much of the ground Miss Deborah had traveled, but her point of view was different. She looked at the question from Mark Henderson's side. "Dear," she said at last, "it isn't only what is best for you, but what is best for him. You don't mean to be selfish, but by refusing him you run the risk of spoiling his life."

Frances gave an expressive shrug of the shoulders. "It isn't as if I were the only woman he had ever cared for."

"Mrs. Lutterworth says the best in him has been

touched for the first time. I knew of a case once," Lucy added timidly, "where a man was in love with a woman. He thought she did not love him, and he—it ruined his life."

"Such cases must be rare, and if a man hasn't any more backbone than that he isn't worth worrying over."

"Frances, you have the hardness of youth. I was just as hard once. There are not many compensations for growing older, but one is that we are more charitable; and our standards change. The sins we can't forgive when we are young seem not so much greater than the sins we never recognized. I am wondering, dear, if you give Mr. Henderson up, how you will feel twenty years later. Life is hard at the best. Few of us make a brilliant success of it. Most of us look back with regret and forward with dread. You will do a little good in the world, good you will hardly recognize, because it will be so mixed with failure; you will help the sick to get well, often when they would rather die, and you will try to comfort the sorrowing, but for the most part you won't succeed, and after twenty years you will say, 'What is the use of it all? Of the work, and struggle, and effort? If I could only have back my lost youth! If I could only be in the sunshine once more with Mark on that glorious June day gathering honeysuckle!' Frances, dear, sorrow comes to all;

suffering comes, but it is not to all that happiness comes, with outstretched hands; and you turn aside from it! You, who have the one chance other women have dreamed of and longed for; you, in your arrogant youth, turn lightly away, as if it were a thing of no value. If I could have had the chance you have twenty years ago, I should have grasped it and led a full life. As it is, I can never get over the sense of having missed the one best thing."

"Dear Miss Lucy," said Frances, as she shyly pressed her friend's hand.

Lucy was so sure she had made an impression on Frances that she had an exalted feeling for the rest of the day. Lucy was at last beginning to see, she told herself, that personal disappointment was of little consequence, if, by means of it, one could help others. She felt that Frances was taking the ground she did from a mistaken sense of loyalty to her father, and that if he could only be made to advocate the marriage, his daughter's tender conscience would be satisfied. It was not an easy thing to discuss such a delicate matter with Dr. Simonds. He was a man with whom Lucy found it difficult to talk on any subject, but she accomplished the task and found him more sympathetic than she had supposed so quiet and reserved a man could be. It made her happy to think that, owing to her, two

people would be brought together, who otherwise would have drifted apart.

"Frances," said her father, the evening after Lucy Wyatt's call, "will you come into my office? I want to have a little talk with you."

"I am glad I am not a patient," Frances said, as she seated herself opposite her father, who was in his revolving chair. "I at once feel as if I had some serious trouble of the heart or brain. You seem to be looking down into the depths of my soul."

"I wish I could look into your soul, Frances. I am afraid I am not so observing of all your symptoms as I ought to be."

"Father, what do you mean?"

He got up and took a turn around the room. Then he sat down again in the revolving-chair. "That man, that Mr. Henderson, who wants to marry you——" he began and paused.

"That man, that Mr. Henderson," she mimicked. "Well, what of him? It is curious, isn't it, that he has taken a fancy to me? You didn't think anybody ever would, did you, father? Neither did I."

"I wasn't sure anyone would have the sense."

The clock on the mantelpiece ticked away a couple of minutes before either of them spoke. Then the doctor began again, "Frances, if you like that man, I advise you to marry him."

"Father!"

"You mustn't consider me in the least. When we planned that you were to be a trained-nurse, we did not know you would so soon have the chance to enter this other profession. Your mother will be delighted with the match, and Ned will be pleased, he has been so strongly opposed to your going into the hospital. I shall be glad, too, if it means that you will be happy."

Dr. Simonds stopped speaking, and again looked into his daughter's grave eyes. "Do you love this man?" he asked finally.

"No, father, not as I could love. But I can't help feeling his charm, and his caring for me so much flatters me. If I were to marry him I am afraid all that is best in me would be stifled. He appeals so strongly to one side of me that I have had moments of wondering if I cannot do as he asks. But when I think of a future with him, I see myself drifting, wearing the pretty clothes that all women like, doing nothing, with less and less of a struggle, and feeling at last as if my life were a failure, for I know I could not satisfy him long."

"I am not so sure of that; you have satisfied me for twenty-four years. Frances," said the doctor, taking another turn around the office, "marriage is not a light and casual thing. This being bound for life, unless you are bound to the right person, is intolerable. An unhappy marriage, for a woman of

your temperament would mean a far worse failure than failing in your profession. But are you sure you cannot love him? If you think you have it in your power to do for him all he believes you can do, why, go ahead with my blessing and——”

“Mr. Henderson to see Miss Frances,” the maid announced.

Frances was intercepted by her mother. “He is out on the side piazza,” Mrs. Simonds said, with suppressed excitement. “He has been talking to me. He has charming manners, so genial and affable. He is so different from your father, who is often indifferent and absorbed, and——”

“My father’s manners are quite good enough to satisfy me.”

“There is no need of your flaring up like that! You are just like him. To think a daughter of mine should be so indifferent to a good offer! If you could only have been a man and Ned a woman, he would have accepted Mr. Henderson at once. Mr. Henderson is such a perfect gentleman and so rich, it is like a fairy tale your having such a chance, and you could go to Europe. And Ned is so ambitious, that having a sister in a hospital seems like a family disgrace.”

“I have come to say good-by,” said Mark Henderson, as Frances joined him on the piazza.

“I am sorry it must be good-by.”

"If you were really sorry, it would not be good-by. How I wish I could make you see my point of view! It seems such a frightful waste for you to do this nursing which other women, less sensitively organized, can do better, such a frightful waste, and I need you so. It is the irony of fate that the only woman I ever really cared for should not care for me."

"It is because I do not care more that you care so much."

"Try me and see!" he said eagerly. "Give me the chance to prove how much I care!"

The languorous fragrance of the grape blossoms was mingling with the moonlight; the outer world seemed full of poetry and romance. Frances felt that in this dreamy atmosphere it would not be hard to let herself drift and take the advice of those who were older and wiser than she. Mark's voice and the expression of his dark eyes thrilled her. Perhaps he felt that momentary hesitation in his favor, for he instantly drew a picture of what her life would be with him, and contrasted it with the drudgery and discouragement that awaited her if she became a nurse.

Inside, the office lamp was burning, and she could hear the click of the type-writer. The doctor was already hard at work. A great wave of sympathy for her father swept over her. As Mark went on

with his rapid sketch every detail of hard work that he pictured made her realize the more strongly the trials of her father's life. She knew she could never have that passionate sense of nearness to her lover; she knew that she could never be satisfied with anything short of giving her best.

Those older people had been born in a different period. They could not judge for her.

"Must it be good-by?" Mark asked wistfully.

"It must be good-by," she said.

A SUMMER OUTING

VIII

A SUMMER OUTING

JOHNS FORSYTH'S aunts would not hear for a moment of his paying board for himself and his family the summer he spent at their house.

"I hope we shall never be so reduced as not to be able to have our relatives visit us," his aunt Letitia had said with reproachful dignity. So John made them a present of the cow, and the next year he sent them a generous check to be used in taking a summer outing. To Lucy this gift was another of those aggravating freaks of destiny with which her pathway through life had been plentifully strewn. Any other summer she would have been delighted to have the change, but now she wanted to stay at home, because, for the first time in many years, she had made a new friend.

Josephine Mason, a music-teacher, and second cousin to Dr. Simonds, had come, with her grand piano, to Mrs. Homer Newhall's boarding-house, to recruit after an illness. She was young enough

to be the doctor's daughter, but many years older than Frances. Josephine was extremely fond of her older and younger relatives, but was always at swords' points with the doctor's wife. She begged the Simondses not to ask anyone to call on her, for she wanted a quiet time to practice and rest. This was not at all in accordance with Mrs. Simonds's ideas of hospitality, and to the dismay of her husband and daughter she insisted upon inaugurating their cousin's arrival by a large tea-party.

Josephine had many charms, but patience under adverse conditions was not one of them.

"Cousin Clara, I expressly said I didn't want to meet a soul," she protested. "I hate knowing a lot of people. I want to work without being bothered."

"My dear, it is much more wholesome for you to know people, and I want something going on for Frances's sake. She had such a gay time last month when Mr. Henderson was here, a charming fellow with delightful manners,—Oh! I forgot that you know him,—and he offered himself to Frances, who did not care for him, foolish child, because she had set her heart on going into a hospital. Ned was very indignant, it was such a chance for her to get on in the world. And I liked Mr. Henderson so much! It was really very trying of her."

"It would have been more unselfish if she had

married to please you and Ned," Josephine remarked drily.

"That is it exactly. You have hit the nail on the head, but dear Frances is just like her father. They have their good points, but they are self-centred. As for the tea-party, I have only asked our dear neighbors, the Wyatts. Lucy is a sweet girl, about your age, whom you are sure to like, and Laura Macauley,—she is the most fashionable young lady in town, and she had a dancing-party last month, so it will be a great relief to do her up; and, let me see! Bertha Hall, she is young and pretty; I have asked her on Ned's account, and I felt I must invite the Lutterworths, our clergyman and his wife, because they asked us to tea when Mr. Henderson was staying with them. They are delightful people. Mrs. Lutterworth has a rather sharp tongue, but she is very amusing, and her husband is somewhat dreamy and has moods, but he is clever, and you are sure to get on with him."

"By all means put me between the clergyman who has moods and Cousin Andrew, who never talks if he can help it; it will be so restful; we will have a quiet little corner by ourselves, but deliver me from the sweet girl about my age, and the fashionable young lady, and the woman with the sharp tongue."

"Now, Josephine, I think it is unkind of you to

be satirical at the expense of my guests. I expect you to mix all these people up and make things go."

When the evening came Josephine rose to the occasion, as her cousin knew she would. To be bored was the one thing she could not endure, and rather than submit to it, she exerted herself to such good purpose that all the company, with the exception of Laura Macauley, pronounced her charming. Miss Macauley thought she monopolized the conversation too much. She did not like brilliant women, and it annoyed her to find that Miss Mason, who was at least six years older than she, looked far younger. And indeed dark-eyed Josephine, in a thin black gown, with a single red rose in her bodice, was such a radiant vision that it was no wonder Miss Macauley found herself in the shade. Even Ned Simonds, whom she could usually count on for as much devotion as his blasé nature permitted, went over to the standard of her rival. This young man had the supreme happiness of living in Boston the greater part of the year, where he was a rising architect, and this good fortune made him indifferent to the charms of Eppingham society. Always on the alert for intellect and social prestige when they were definitely labeled, he spent his life trying to get into a charmed circle, where he was not particularly wanted, and in unintentionally wounding

the feelings of his old friends, who, for some strange reason, were always eager to welcome him. His clothes bore the hall-mark of the latest fashion, and his manners were subdued to aristocratic calm. He was often ashamed of his father's and sister's brusque ways, and of their indifference to dress, while his mother's never-ceasing trickle of conversation was a continual irritation to him. To-night, however, under Josephine's influence, he exerted himself to a phenomenal degree. He admired his cousin more than any woman he knew, although her unconventional ways were often a trial to him.

The guest at the tea-party whom Josephine liked the best was Miss Letitia Wyatt. Miss Wyatt showed to excellent advantage on any social occasion. At home she was often trying, but in another person's house, where she had no sense of responsibility, she gave herself over to frank enjoyment of the moment. She was serenely handsome and dignified, talking just enough, and drawing out other people. Josephine felt that it would not be a disadvantage to have reached the age of sixty, if one could carry the years with such grace. Miss Deborah was unusually subdued. Josephine liked her, however, and wanted to see more of her; Bertha Hall was the type of young girl she disliked most, and Josephine characterized "that sweet Lucy Wyatt" as a "washed-out blonde, with no mind of

her own." So much for first impressions. They were modified on the occasion of her call on the Wyatts. The two older sisters were out, and Josephine gave an impatient sigh when she was told Miss Lucy was at home, saying it was just her luck. Josephine had not been in when Lucy called on her, but they had met twice at the Simonds' since the tea-party, and on the last occasion Miss Mason had given the company some music.

"I am so glad to see you," Lucy said shyly, looking very pale and fragile, as she came forward to meet her guest. "I am sorry my sisters are not at home."

Josephine, in the affluence of her renewed health, felt a sudden pity for the "washed-out blonde."

"You look ill," she said. "I am afraid the hot weather is too much for you," and at the end of fifteen minutes she found herself asking Lucy Wyatt to spend an afternoon with her in the apple-orchard behind Mrs. Newhall's house.

"I want to tell you how much I like your music," Lucy said, as her guest rose to go. "I hear so little music that I don't always care for it. Sometimes it seems as if people played to show how well they can do it, mechanically, but when you were playing I forgot all about you. I only thought of the music, the wonderful soul of it, as it was meant to be."

“Do you like music so much? Come and listen to my practising any morning you like. Come at eleven; by that time I am through with scales and exercises. Do you play yourself?”

“No. I used to a little long ago, but I never played well. Letitia was a much better musician, but we have both given it up.”

“Now, why did I invite that girl to come any morning she liked to hear me practise?” Josephine asked herself as she went down the Wyatts’ steps. “She will probably be turning up six days in the week, for I don’t believe she has a blessed thing to do.”

Lucy, however, had that rare tact which prevented her taking undue advantage of any invitation. She came once to hear Miss Mason play, and she spent one afternoon with her in the apple-orchard, then she waited in a dignified manner until her new acquaintance should accept some hospitality from her. This Miss Mason was not eager to do, so they came to a dead-lock, and for a week they did not meet. The time passed serenely for Josephine, but Lucy was already in that fever of excitement that is the beginning of a great love, for, with all the suppressed passion of a thwarted nature, she had given her heart without a shadow of reserve to this beautiful, fascinating woman. There was no reason now, as there had been when she was young, she told her-

self, for crushing out the feeling by calling pride to her aid. Nothing but happiness could come from loving another woman. She asked little in return, only to be allowed to sit humbly at her friend's feet, to look into her ardent eyes and to hear her talk about her brilliant future.

At the end of the week Lucy, tired and pale, met Josephine, strong and rosy, in the post-office. Lucy's heart began to beat so fast that she caught her breath. With a sudden access of shyness she hid herself behind a group of men. When she found that Miss Mason was actually going out of the door without seeing her, she stepped forward timidly.

"My dear Miss Wyatt, what have you been doing with yourself the last three or four days?" Josephine asked.

Lucy had a little pang when she found that the long week seemed so short to her friend.

"I have been meaning to come and look you up," Miss Mason went on, "but my cousins have taken a great deal of my time. When can you come for another afternoon in the hammock? I'll promise not to talk about myself so much. I'll read aloud to you. My cousin Ned says I read aloud well, and if he says so I feel competent to give public readings at once. How do you do, Mrs. Lutterworth?"

Don't go, Miss Wyatt. I'll walk back with you, if you will wait a minute."

They went down the village street together between the rows of drooping elms, these two women, so nearly of an age, for whom life had been so different. It was a sultry morning, but Lucy forgot the heat, she had felt almost too languid to go to the post-office, but now there was a new light in her eyes and fresh strength in her tired body. The world had been made over for her.

In the next few weeks the misery caused by Josephine's frequent indifference was tempered for Lucy by the radiant joy that followed her occasional kindness.

When John's gift came, making a summer outing possible, the pain Lucy felt was almost more than she could bear.

"We will go to the sea-shore," Miss Deborah said. She and Lucy had often planned taking a trip of this kind together.

"The sea air is always bad for me," said Miss Letitia. "I am apt to feel depressed by the sea, and I don't like the dampness. I am sure you and Lucy will enjoy the mountains, and we had much better decide to go there."

Long experience had taught the younger sisters that it was better to yield to Letitia in a matter of

this kind, for she was not easy to live with when they went to a place she had not chosen.

"I don't know what on earth we can do with Mr. Gray if Bridget goes home," said Miss Deborah, "and I don't wonder she objects to staying in the house without one of us."

"I have provided for Mr. Gray," Miss Letitia announced complacently, "Laura Macauley's servants are to stay in her house while she is in Newport; they can just as well take care of an extra cat, and Mr. Gray will be glad to visit his old home."

"You are planning to leave Mr. Gray with the Macauleys' servants! Letitia Wyatt! I knew you were somewhat hard-hearted about cats, but I did not think you would go to such lengths! I have no respect for Laura Macauley. I should be ashamed to own such a thin cat. Laura said to me the other day when I was feeding my precious Mr. Gray, 'Do you give your cat meat?'—she didn't even call him by his name.—'Ours lives on mice,'—as if any respectable cat would be contented to live like the Chinese! Mice are all very well for an extra, but you can see for yourself, by looking at the Macauleys' cat, that mice alone are not satisfying. If that Hannah had the charge of him, Mr. Gray would waste away to a shadow. Rather than have that happen I will give up the trip and stay at home to keep house for him."

"Deborah Wyatt! You are a perfect fool about that cat."

"I will stay at home," said Lucy.

"You? You are always afraid of your own shadow."

"Bridget would stay with me. I should not mind."

"My dear, there is such a thing as being too unselfish. You have always longed to go away for the summer."

"It isn't unselfishness. I should really like the quiet of it, and—I should have Miss Mason."

"Miss Mason is a charming girl, but she couldn't do your health so much good as a trip to the mountains," said Miss Letitia.

The growing intimacy between Miss Mason and Lucy made her vaguely uneasy. She did not believe in these sudden friendships compounded of ardent love on one side and cool acceptance on the other.

"I am going to the mountains with Letitia and Deborah," Lucy told her friend the next time they met, "and I would much rather stay at home."

"Then why don't you stay?" asked Josephine.

Lucy was lying in a hammock under the apple trees loaded with their freight of pale-green embryo apples. She looked up at the blue sky and floating white clouds. A robin flew across the orchard and

perched on a branch above her head. She had often longed for a bird's freedom to go where it pleased; now, she envied the apple tree the power to stay behind.

"I must go because my sisters think it is best."

"But, my dear, you are not a child."

"They say the change of air will do me good."

"I am better for you than the whole White Mountain range."

"I know it."

"If your sisters are not willing to have you stay in the house alone tell them you will take your part of your nephew's present and spend the summer with me at Mrs. Newhall's."

This audacious proposal brought the color to Lucy's cheeks. Such happiness would be so revolutionary as to be intoxicating.

"They would never hear of it," she said quietly, the light dying out of her face, "and it would be too selfish. Deborah finds it a little wearing to be with Letitia without me; no one could be more anxious to make us happy than Letitia is, but she does not like everyone, and she has been used to a great deal of devotion, and Deborah, who is the dearest woman in the world, is a little quick-tempered; Letitia would find it hard to be with her without me."

"In short, you are a kind of pillow interposed so

their angles won't rub each other. It must be wearing to be a pillow year in and year out."

Josephine was relieved to find that her new friend was not going to accept her impulsive invitation. She was sorry for her, and she was growing fond of her, but what she would do if she were to have her society morning, noon and night she could hardly imagine.

The difficulty concerning Mr. Gray was solved by means of an indulgent hotel-keeper and a stout bag. Miss Deborah carried the bag that ended in a fluffy gray head. Miss Letitia's dignity was severely tried on the occasion of her being a member of such a conspicuous company. She had never believed in taking Mr. Gray to the mountains; but although she let Deborah and Lucy share the seat with him she did not sit at the other end of the car as the natural woman prompted her to do; but bravely took the seat behind her sisters, ready to share whatever obloquy attended them. They had an uneasy suspicion that the transporting of animals in passenger-cars was forbidden. Miss Deborah had decided what she should do if the conductor objected to Mr. Gray's presence. She intended gravely to introduce her favorite and ask if he were young enough to go for half-fare. She hoped the conductor would have a sense of humor. He proved an unresponsive being who did not notice

Mr. Gray. Although this was convenient Miss Deborah was disappointed. She had hoped for a dramatic scene.

The chief advantage of the mountain place Miss Letitia had chosen was its view of the presidential range. The mountains were some miles away,—Miss Letitia never liked to be too shut in, for that meant dampness which might end in grippe. There was a slight drawback to the place which the sisters discovered on the night of their arrival, and this was that the presidential range had its off days. On the foggy July evening when they descended from the Chatfield Inn coach, the famous mountain range had vanished utterly—Chatfield Centre might have been Eppingham, save that its river was muddy instead of clear and that in the foreground some ugly cottages and a hideous saw-mill stood out effectively. These unsightly objects were near enough to be always present. Miss Letitia had chosen to be in one of the cottages of the hotel; this meant ten dollars a week instead of twelve, and greater quiet, but when they inspected their quarters they discovered that the cottages were at the bottom of the hill and the hotel part way up. The two were connected by an inclined plane with cleats, reminding Miss Deborah of a hen-ladder. Their rooms were on the lower floor of the cottage. The season had been a wet one, and it seemed as if they could see

and taste the dampness as well as feel it. Miss Deborah longed to remark that the spot her sister had chosen was far dryer than the seashore, but she refrained, for Letitia had been so forbearing about the cat. Lucy began to unpack her trunk and tried to keep the tears from her eyes. Miss Deborah was absorbed by Mr. Gray, who, less reticent than the others, expressed his feelings in a series of frank mews. Miss Letitia, being indirectly responsible for their discomfort, tried to make the best of things, but she was more than reconciled when her sister Deborah told the landlord that they could not stay unless he gave them better rooms. Finally the sisters transferred their belongings to the upper story of the cottage, where open fires kept the dampness at bay. Here they awaited, with what philosophy they could assume, the return of the presidential range. The other people in the hotel were second rate. Miss Letitia said in her dignified way that she could never bear second-rate people. Miss Deborah was so running over with kindness and sociability that she brought down this remark upon herself by making advances to a family who did not speak correct English. This family with one accord took a great fancy to the spirited middle-aged lady, and invited her to join them on a walk, in a pause between two showers. In due time Miss Deborah introduced her

sisters to the Carfields, and Letitia and Lucy were included in the second walk. Miss Letitia was the companion of Mrs. Carfield, who took the initiative in conversation by remarking, "Ain't this a lovely place?"

"I should think it might be when you can see the view," returned Miss Letitia.

"The view is elegant," said Mrs. Carfield.

After this conversation languished, and it was upon her return that Miss Letitia confided her views to her sisters concerning second-rate people.

They had spent a rainy ten days at Chatfield Centre when one evening a letter in Laura Macauley's pointed handwriting was brought to Miss Letitia.

"My dears," she cried breathlessly, "a great chance has come to me. That dear Laura Macauley has invited me to spend the rest of the summer with her at Newport. She is at one of the most fashionable hotels. The only difficulty is about clothes. It will not cost me anything otherwise, as I am to take the place of her aunt, who has had to go home on account of an attack of appendicitis. She has to have an operation, poor thing; I am sorry for her, but it is providential for me—Laura cannot stay in that great hotel without a chaperone. I feel selfish to go, but you wouldn't enjoy Newport, Deborah, and Lucy is too young for a chaperone."

"I thought you did not like sea air," Miss Deborah was unchristian enough to remark.

"Nothing could be damper than this place. I have not liked to complain, as there did not seem to be anything that could be done about it, but my throat has been irritated for the last day or two. The north shore does not agree with me, but Newport is so far south the climate will be mild. I have always wanted to go there, and Laura knows a delightful set of people, so that socially it will be a great advantage to me."

It ended in Miss Letitia's chaperoning Laura Macauley at Newport. Miss Deborah and Lucy longed to go home, but they had all three engaged their rooms for a month and the landlord did not feel that he could let them off, his house being only half-filled. Miss Letitia was so majestic and over-awing, and she laid so much stress on the dampness at Chatfield Centre, and her delicate health, that the landlord unwillingly allowed her to give up her room and pay nothing, and so the others felt all the more bound to stay.

"It is a little trying that we, who wanted to go to the sea-shore, should have to stay in this place and Letitia, who chose the mountains, should be the one to go to the sea-shore," Miss Deborah observed to Lucy, as they walked back from the station after having bidden their sister good-by. "However,

we'll manage to have a great deal of fun now the sun has come out; still it is just a trifle aggravating."

"Most things in life are aggravating," said Lucy.

MISS DEBORAH'S GARDEN

IX

MISS DEBORAH'S GARDEN

THE evening before the Wyatts' departure for the mountains Mrs. Lutterworth had come in to bid them good-by.

Miss Deborah was in a despondent mood, a rare thing for her.

"I wish to goodness John had never sent us the wherewithal for a summer vacation," she observed. "When you have money given you for a certain purpose, if you have a New England conscience you feel bound to spend it in just that way, but I am homesick already when I think of having to leave——"

"Me, and the rest of your friends?" Mrs. Lutterworth inquired.

"No, the garden. I can't help thinking of all the caterpillars and cut-worms and beetles that will have a feast. Patrick is so careless."

"Miss Deborah, I believe you love the garden better than anything in the world but your sisters and the cat."

“ ‘The cat and your sisters,’ you should have said,” interpolated Miss Letitia.

“ It isn’t very flattering,” Mrs. Lutterworth went on in her vivacious way. “ You can’t bear to leave the garden, and you love the cat so well you take him with you, but you can say good-by to me without a pang.”

“ Sarah Lutterworth, I have such perfect confidence in your power to look after yourself and others that I can leave you with an easy mind, whereas Mr. Gray, poor dear creature, would be lost without me, and so I very much fear will the garden.”

Miss Deborah’s fears proved true prophets. When she and Lucy came home from the mountains a week earlier than they first planned, a period of drought, joined to Patrick’s conscience, that was not of New England origin, had turned their once blooming garden into an insects’ paradise.

Miss Deborah went from one patch of flowers to another, mourning their fate in an ever-increasing crescendo of despair.

“ Lucy, the sweet peas are blighted,” she announced. “ The dry weather has been too much for them. I wish we could have imported some of our mountain rains. Look at the dahlias, Lucy! They are drying up! The garden hasn’t been watered properly. I knew how it would be. Look at those

blister-beetles! Heavens! What a looking garden! And the corn! Cut-worms have been at work there! Patrick O'Halloran, what were you thinking of?"

"Shure, ma'am, I didn't create the cut-worms," he said sulkily.

"I am aware of that. I never accused you of having ingenuity enough to create anything. Why under the sun didn't you water things properly?"

"Shure, ma'am, I was watering and watering, until I nearly got a sun-stroke, and then the hose busted."

"Well, if it hadn't been for Clara Simonds and Frances, we shouldn't have anything left," said Miss Deborah. "I am very glad they made you buy a new hose. There is one comfort, their garden is in almost as bad a condition. What am I saying? I oughtn't to take comfort in a thing like that. I am glad Letitia is away. The state of the garden would annoy her exceedingly."

Deborah and Lucy missed their sister, but there was a kind of freedom that came with her absence which was almost intoxicating. They took their tea in the woods two or three times a week, and on pleasant mornings had their breakfast served on the piazza; they ate baked-beans and brown bread as often as they liked, and on one never-to-be-forgotten occasion went so far as to indulge in a roast of pork. They even lost their heads to such

an extent as to invite old Peter Newhall to spend a day with them. All these things occurred, however, after Miss Deborah's great *coup d'état* concerning the garden.

"I am sure the flowers would do better if we could import a few toads to eat up the insects," she said to Lucy, the morning after their return.

"How are you going to get your toads?" Lucy asked languidly.

"Lucy Wyatt! You are the most unenterprising person! You are not lazy; you'd water and weed, and water and weed until your back broke, but it would never occur to you to improve matters. Listen to this extract from the *Farmer's Voice*.

"'Centipedes, caterpillars, blister-beetles and bugs of every description are equally welcomed by the toad. . . . Half a dozen toads in a garden will keep it free from the ordinary garden pests. They are easily tamed, and spend the day in some shaded nook along the fence or under a cabbage-leaf, coming sedately forth at night to find their food.' There are toads enough in town. I shall offer to pay Patrick five cents for every toad he brings me."

Patrick proved to be no more enterprising than Lucy, and Miss Deborah was obliged to take more stringent measures.

Lucy found her one morning busily writing. "I wish Letitia were here to put this advertisement in

proper shape," she said. "Letitia is so clever with her pen. But I can't wait to send this to Newport, and I suppose she would think my scheme was crazy. I have decided to advertise in the *County News* for toads. There are plenty of toads in Eppingham and plenty of children. The only thing is to devise a scheme to bring them together. How does this read?

" 'WANTED TOADS!!' That will attract the eye of the most hardened reader.

" 'Children here is your chance. Five cents reward for every toad brought to number 52 Main Street, Eppingham. No frogs need apply.' "

"I think it would be a little more dignified to leave that out about the children, and say five cents will be given for every toad brought to number 52 Main Street, Eppingham, frogs not desired," said Lucy with hesitation.

"It would take all the spice out of the advertisement to alter it; it can't be very dignified, no matter how you word it," said Miss Deborah, with a little laugh. "I am glad Letitia is not at home. She would find it such a—departure. I have always said I wanted my fling, and now I am having it."

"Aren't you afraid of getting too many toads, if you advertise in a paper?" Lucy asked timidly.

"Too many! My dear Lucy, Patrick has been

hunting the town the last two days and hasn't found one. I am afraid I shan't get enough. I don't expect more than ten or twelve at the outside."

Lucy went down to the office of the *County News* with her sister, who requested the editor to put the advertisement in two issues of his semi-weekly paper. This was a little expensive, but Miss Deborah was sure it was better to give her experiment a fair trial. The paper was issued on Saturday morning, and the day passed with no results. Early Sunday morning, just as the sisters were finishing their baked beans, the doorbell rang, and Bridget came in with a broad smile on her face.

"Please, ma'am, a boy and girl want to see you, and they've got something in a basket."

"Toads!" ejaculated Miss Deborah, and she rose hastily.

"We saw an advertisement as said you wanted toads," the little girl explained shyly.

Miss Deborah opened the cover of the basket. "They are frogs," she cried. "I especially said I did not want frogs. If you can't tell a frog from a toad, you had better go to vacation school. I am not going to give you a blessed cent, not one, and you can take these frogs back to the bog where you got them."

A pitiful expression came into the faces of the children. They turned away sadly and silently.

Their torn clothes and general air of dejection went straight to Miss Deborah's kind heart.

"Do you like baked beans?" she inquired in a conciliatory tone.

"You bet!" said the boy.

She ushered them into the dining-room, where Lucy was finishing her coffee.

"You didn't have much breakfast, I imagine," she hazarded, as they hungrily despatched the baked-beans and brown-bread.

"No, ma'am. We had to be up very early, we wanted to get ahead of the Baxter boys."

"Are they looking for toads?"

"Yes'm. There's four Baxter boys, and we was afraid mebbe you'd have all the toads you wanted before we come along, so we got up at four o'clock."

When Miss Deborah bade them good-bye she had relented so far as to say, "You can take the frogs back, but I'll give you ten cents each on account of your trouble."

Miss Deborah and Lucy were just starting for church and were walking sedately down Main Street, in their gently rustling summer silks, holding their pongee parasols to shield them from the torrid rays of the sun, when they met a straggling procession of four unkempt children. Two of them carried large tin pails.

"The Baxter boys!" was Miss Deborah's prophetic cry.

"Can you tell me, please, the house the toad lady lives in?" asked the oldest boy.

"I am the toad lady," replied Miss Deborah, assuming as much dignity as was possible. "I live in that white house with the lilac bushes in the front yard. Goodness, Lucy, what shall I do? We are late for church already. I shall be very late if I go back now, but I can't miss a chance like this, or disappoint these children. I hope you have brought me toads and not frogs."

"They are toads all right," said the oldest boy lifting the cover of his pail, and allowing Miss Deborah to look inside, where she saw a merry company of six bright-eyed toads. "There's eight in Jim's box," he announced.

Miss Deborah made a rapid calculation. "Five times fourteen are seventy cents," she said, "and Bridget hasn't got home from early mass—she must have stopped at her brother's; there is nothing for it but to go back. Lucy, go on to church, and if I don't get there, for heaven's sake don't tell Mrs. Lutterworth the reason why. Lie, Lucy, lie like a—a Filipino, say I am ill, that I mind the heat; say anything but the truth. If Sarah Lutterworth should get hold of this I should never hear the last of it."

"Shan't I go back too?" suggested Lucy.
"Then nobody can ask any questions."

"My dear, everyone would think we were at death's door if one of us wasn't at church. We should have the whole town coming to inquire."

Lucy proceeded down the quiet elm-shaded village street to the accompaniment of church bells. She was a little late, and slipped into her seat half-way up the broad aisle as unobtrusively as she could, but she was conscious of innumerable eyes fixed upon her. She knew everyone was wondering why Deborah was not there, Deborah, who never missed a Sunday at church.

After the service was over Lucy tried to slip out without speaking to anyone, but Mrs. Lutterworth hastened down the aisle and caught up with her before she reached the church door.

"I hope Miss Deborah isn't ill?" she asked.

"No," said Lucy, "she feels the heat a little."

"I am so sorry! I never knew Miss Deborah to give up church for weather."

"She wouldn't have stayed at home merely for that, but—the fact is she was detained by callers who came just as we were leaving home," said Lucy, thinking it just as well to say something approximate to the truth. She was sure the person who invented lying did not live in a country town, for it is so futile under these circumstances to tell any-

thing but the blunt, unvarnished truth. Before the day was over all the aristocracy of Eppingham knew who Deborah Wyatt's callers were. Mrs. Simonds, from her window, saw her greet the procession of boys and turn back with them, and had a discussion with her maid as to whether the pails contained toads or berries. They finally came to the conclusion that Miss Deborah would not have given up church for anything less unusual than toads. Directly after dinner Mrs. Simonds telephoned the news to Mrs. Lutterworth.

"I fancy Deborah Wyatt will have all the toads she wants for one while, before she gets through," she said.

And indeed before Monday was over Miss Deborah had already regretted that her advertisement was destined to appear in two issues of the paper.

"This makes eight children who have been here already," she said, as she bought a modest quartette of toads, Monday morning. "Lucy, I shall have to trouble you to see the editor when you are down town, and tell him to stop the advertisement. If he'll give me my money back for the time it isn't put in the paper, so much the better, but I would rather pay for something I don't have than be inundated with toads. If it goes on much longer I shall be ruined."

"I don't believe you will have any more toads brought you," said Lucy soothingly.

"You don't know anything about it," and this proved to be true.

When Lucy came back Miss Deborah met her with a tragic gesture. "You needn't tell me that I sha'n't have any more toads brought me. This thing is as bad as one of those endless chains. Every child tells ten other children that I will pay five cents a toad. The Baxter boys have been here again with ten more toads, ten,—Lucy, do you hear? And some friends of theirs came with six. I wish John were here to swear for me. I am ready to consign those toads to eternal perdition. Lucy, you needn't laugh in that heartless way. Not another toad will I pay for; I've told them not to come again, and to tell all their friends that the market is overstocked."

In spite of this warning, the door bell rang again late in the afternoon, and Bridget came up with her face wreathed in those maddening smiles.

"Well, who is it?" asked Miss Deborah shortly.

"They didn't give their names, ma'am, but there's two of 'em, little girls, this time, and they've got a basket."

"Confound it!" Miss Deborah spoke with deliberation and a certain relish. "It is a little late in life to begin to swear," she said to Lucy. "I don't know what Letitia would say. I won't take another

toad, not one. I have thirty-two already. I shall land in the poor house."

"But you promised," said Lucy.

"Hang it, Lucy, I can't help it if I did." She descended the stairs in a stormy mood. "You can go away," she said to the children, "I have all the toads I want. I did not mean to keep on taking them all summer."

Tears came into the eyes of the smaller girl. "The paper said the lady would pay five cents for every toad," she remarked in a faltering voice.

"You can never believe all you see in the paper," said Miss Deborah with dignity.

The little girl lifted up the cover of the basket in a hesitating way. "There's six, and we worked real hard to get them," she said.

Miss Deborah was beginning to feel heartily ashamed of herself. "Come into the dining-room and I will make you some lemonade," she told them. "After all, a promise is a promise. I will take the six toads. Thirty-eight," she added under her breath.

The next morning she took another notice to the editor, stating that no more toads were wanted, but in spite of this fact toads arrived in rapid succession. Before the week was over Miss Deborah found herself the possessor of sixty of these interesting creatures. Lucy always took the children's part, but

when the high-water mark of sixty was reached, even Lucy thought it time to call a halt.

"I've spent three dollars on those confounded toads," Miss Deborah said, "not to mention the twenty cents for frogs I didn't keep; if it goes on much longer it will be worse than one of the plagues. I am sorry Letitia is so disturbed. She writes that we are making ourselves the laughing-stock of Eppingham. I suppose Sarah Lutterworth has sent her one of her lively letters. It is funny! Of course it is funny! I can see myself that there is an amusing side to it, but I don't see why Letitia should mind when she is neatly out of it. Who would have supposed that toads were so numerous in Eppingham?"

After Miss Deborah's sixty toads had been cheerfully disporting themselves in her garden for a few days, John Forsyth unexpectedly arrived to spend a night with his aunts on the way to join his family at North East Harbor.

It was delightful to see the dear fellow, but both aunts devoutly hoped he would not hear of the toad episode, for they were beginning to feel sensitive, and their nephew had a sense of humor.

"It is so good to see you," John said, as they all three sat out on the piazza after tea. "I was in Newport for a day or two last week, and I hunted up Aunt Letitia. She is at one of the swellest hotels,

and I thought she looked in first-rate condition, but she seemed a little homesick."

"Letitia homesick?" Miss Deborah asked incredulously.

"I fancy being with Miss Macauley isn't all Aunt Letitia's fancy painted it. She said something enigmatical about never knowing people until you live in the house with them. She said Miss Macauley was a most interesting woman, but that she liked her own way," he added, with a gleam of amusement in his eyes. "In short, I think Aunt Letitia will be quite reconciled when her time is up. How well your hollyhocks and sweet peas and dahlias are looking, Aunt Deborah."

"Don't be satirical, John; the garden never looked so badly. Still, if you could have seen it a fortnight ago when we came down from the mountains, you would be amazed at the improvement."

"Did I see a toad in the garden?" John asked. "I certainly did. There goes another! And there is a third one hopping along! How odd. There is a fourth! I never saw so many toads before."

"The garden is full of them," said Miss Deborah. "They eat the insects, so we are glad to have them."

"I suppose they all happened along of their own accord?" John inquired nonchalantly.

"Quite so," said his aunt Deborah. "The garden gate was ajar and they walked in."

"That was very convenient."

John began to laugh, and so did his aunt Deborah.

"I might have known your aunt Letitia would have told you the whole story," she said.

"You forget that Esther takes the *County News*. Just how many toads have you in your garden?" he asked confidentially.

"Almost precisely the same number as my age, John—just one or two more. Now, you know it isn't polite to ask a lady her age."

"If you have only as many as you are years old, Aunt Deborah, it is a very small number," he returned gallantly.

"Lucy, isn't it pleasant to be with someone who doesn't tell the truth?"

At this point a boy with a pail came up the pathway.

"John, you go and tackle him," said Miss Deborah. "He has toads. Tell him I don't want any."

"Miss Wyatt doesn't want to see you; you can go home," John said.

The boy lingered.

Miss Deborah came down the steps. "I don't want any more toads," she said; "and what is more, I won't take any more toads. I have sixty in my garden. I can't be expected to buy them the rest of my life. Perhaps Mrs. Lutterworth would take

them of you," she added with cheerful malice. "Tell her Miss Wyatt sent you to her."

"I ain't got no toads," said the boy sullenly. "What should I be doing with toads? I've got some blackberries Mr. Newhall sent you from the farm, but if you don't want 'em, I'll take 'em to the other lady."

"We do want them," said Lucy, hurrying down the steps to get the pail. "It was very kind of Mr. Newhall to send them."

John meanwhile had been disgracing the family by laughing immoderately. "I don't want any toads!" he mimicked after the boy had departed. "If you could only have heard yourself, as you made that statement, Aunt Deborah."

"Well, John, I don't believe you would want any if you were in my circumstances."

"What do you suppose that boy thought?" he asked her. "What report will he give the old man? 'Miss Deborah Wyatt has gone crazy,' will be the very mildest way he'll put it. Poor old Peter Newhall! You owe him an explanation."

And so it was that good came out of evil and that Mr. Newhall had that invitation to dine with the Wyatts, an event that was one of the crowning pleasures of a long life. John alone knew why the invitation was given, and he promised never to tell.

A STRUGGLE FOR INDE-
PENDENCE

X

A STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE

"**L**UCY, are you going out on this damp day with your cold?" Miss Letitia asked, as she caught a glimpse of her sister, with her hat and jacket on as she passed through the hall.

"Yes, I've got over my cold."

"I heard you coughing only this morning. The wind is strong from the east," she added, looking out of the window at the majestic gilt cock that surmounted the Browns' stable. "Where are you going?"

Lucy hesitated half a minute; then she said:

"To see Josephine Mason."

"You had better give it up if it isn't anything any more important than that."

"It is almost my last chance: she is going back to Boston the end of the week."

"Deborah," Miss Letitia called, "don't you

think Lucy is crazy to go out on this raw day with her cold?"

Miss Letitia was just recovering from an attack of grippe and observed that she could feel the chill, even in the house with the windows shut. Miss Deborah, on the contrary, had been out of doors all the morning, and took a more cheerful view.

"I don't believe it will hurt her if she is properly dressed," she said, coming in from the next room. "I think you might as well go, dear, if you will wear my fur cape."

Lucy was glad to get off so easily. She took the cape and was about to leave the house when Miss Deborah called after her, "Be sure to take an umbrella, it looks as if it might rain, and be back by five. It is very damp after the sun has gone down. Goodness! I declare, if Mr. Gray isn't after another squirrel! Lucy, catch him! Oh, you are so slow!" and she dashed out of the front door and rescued a gray squirrel who was about to receive the too loving embrace of her cat.

"Mr. Gray, I am surprised at you," Miss Deborah said, as she took him up in her arms. "I don't mind an occasional bird, and chickens are born to be eaten by somebody as surely as the sparks fly upward, but I draw the line at squirrels! Poor old fellow, I know it isn't your fault, it is the way you are made."

Lucy proceeded down the quiet village street and her sister went back into the house.

"Mr. Gray, the wind is strong from the east; I think it will suit your constitution better to stay in the rest of the afternoon," Miss Deborah informed him. She then proceeded to get out a gown she was making for John's little Mary. Time never hung heavy on Miss Deborah's hands; on the contrary the days were not half long enough. She had that combination of unfailing good spirits, joined to energy, which is usually the portion of those who are in perfect health. It was the opposite with her sister Lucy, who had always been delicate.

"I declare," said Miss Deborah, "I forgot to ask Lucy if she had her rubbers on. Did you notice, Letitia?"

"No. It would be just like her not to wear them."

"Well, she is half way to Josephine's now, but it would be a satisfaction to me to know," and Miss Deborah went to the hall closet, where she found three pairs of rubbers in a straight row, her own, which were short and wide, Letitia's long narrow pair, and Lucy's number fours.

"It is just as I thought, she has gone out without them. I wish she could ever learn to take care of herself."

Lucy, meanwhile, was wishing that her sisters

would ever learn that she could take care of herself.

It was a dreary afternoon. The November sun was obscured by dull clouds and the trees were bare: their slender twigs stood out in sharp outline against the gray of the sky. To Lucy everything looked gray, both the present and the future. It was the cheerless beginning of a long winter.

Lucy had hardly become accustomed to being grown-up before she awoke to the fact that she was a middle-aged woman. She had had a long youth, her own position as the youngest of the family, her slight figure, and her golden hair had all served to help her and others to forget that she had passed the boundary where youth gives place to middle-age; but she knew it now; the tell-tale lines in her thin face sharply impressed it on her mind. She was past forty and she had the inexperience of life of a girl. She walked on down the main street of the village, then she turned and went up a narrow side street, pausing irresolutely when she reached a green-house, but finally going in. There were few things that Lucy loved as she loved flowers. The outside of the green-house with its oblong panes of greenish glass gave her the same feeling of keen anticipation that the drop-curtain gives to the theatre-lover.

"Oh, how delightful it is here," she thought, as she was greeted by the warm, damp smell of earth

and the fragrance of roses and carnations. Mrs. Tucker, who kept the green-house was an old school-mate of hers.

"How do you do, Lucy?" she asked. "I'm real glad to see you. Is there anything I can do for you this afternoon?"

"I want some roses; Jacqueminots, if they are not too expensive."

"Jacks come pretty high this time of year. I've got some good ones though in the other room."

There were jars standing on the counter full of cut flowers, thrust in with no thought of symmetry. Lucy's fingers ached to rearrange the red and white and pink carnations, and the roses, pink, white, and yellow, that were all occupying the same large jar.

"There, that's a pretty good show for November," said Mrs. Tucker returning.

"What beauties. How much are they?"

"Two dollars a dozen."

"I'll take a dozen."

"A whole dozen? Goodness! You must have money to burn! Is it an engagement?"

"No."

"Well, I don't suppose it is any of my business. Sit down. It is a long time since I have seen you."

"How are you getting on?"

"First rate, until Ida's marriage last month. That's left me kind o' short-handed. The boys are

real good. They took hold first rate after their father's death, and they do all the heavy work same as if they'd been brought up to it, but they haven't got any taste. Ida always attended to the cut flowers, and she kept the accounts. I'm looking for some spry, trustworthy body to take her place. You don't know of anyone, do you?"

"No, I wish I did. It would be delightful work. And so Ida is married? It does not seem as if you could be old enough to have a married daughter! You are a few months younger than I am."

"What, going so soon? I hoped you could sit down a spell and have a real good talk about old times."

"I can't stop this afternoon, thank you."

"If you hear of any treasure anywhere between twenty and thirty-five let me know. I think on the whole I'd rather have some one older than twenty. Girls are so heedless. They are always thinking of their beaux. Well, good-by, if you must go. How lucky you are to be able to go out any time of day you like, and not to have anything to do but amuse yourself. I wish I was in your shoes!"

"You needn't," said Lucy. "You wouldn't like them if you were. I would give anything in the world if I had something to do."

As Lucy walked up the gravel path that led to Mrs. Newhall's boarding-house she had a feeling of

exhilaration. It was as if the sun had suddenly come out in the November sky and turned the season into June. A moment later she was knocking timidly on the door of Josephine's room.

"Come in," answered a fresh contralto voice that thrilled her through and through.

As Lucy entered the room her eyes were dazzled by the warmth and cheer. On the hearth there was a blazing wood fire that threw its brightness into all the dim corners, and there was not a corner that was commonplace. The dingy wall-paper was almost covered by spirited sketches, gifts of Josephine's artist friends, and the ugly ingrain carpet was buried under oriental rugs. There were rich hangings and quaint pieces of furniture, and Josephine's piano, but best of all there was Josephine herself in the thin black gown that Lucy loved so well, dark-haired, beautiful, brilliant Josephine, a woman almost as old as Lucy herself, and yet a woman who might have sat for a picture of eternal, radiant youth.

"Lucy, how good of you! Are all those beautiful roses for me? How did you know that Jacqueminots were my favorite flower? Wait until I get a vase and you must arrange them. No one can arrange flowers like you; but I must keep this beauty," and she fastened a half-opened bud into her bodice.

"It seems a pity to break up this pretty nest,"

Josephine said presently, giving a hasty glance around the room. "The piano, poor thing, has got to go to-morrow."

Lucy's spirits were sinking lower and lower. "I don't know what I shall do without you," she said in a dreary voice.

"Oh, you will find lots of things to do. That is the joy of life. If it isn't one thing it is another."

"Not for me."

Poor Lucy was feeling the approaching separation so keenly that she could hardly speak. It was intolerable to her that Josephine should go her careless way with hardly a thought for her. "The joy of life! If it is not one thing, it is another!" Those words so lightly spoken suggested a wealth of friendships and interests that filled her with torturing jealousy.

"I believe you are glad to go," she said.

"I can't help being glad to get back to all my friends and the Symphony rehearsals and my pupils. Yes, I am glad, but I'm sorry to leave you. I should like to take you with me."

They talked for a few minutes and then Lucy said timidly, "You promised to play to me whatever I wanted to hear—this last time."

Josephine sat down at the piano and struck a few random chords. "What shall it be first?" she asked.

"The Andante from Beethoven's Fifth Symphony."

Lucy in her corner behind the piano-stool could let her tears flow unnoticed. She called for Chopin, Brahms, Wagner, Schubert, and Beethoven. Josephine played with fire and feeling. She had never had a more passionately appreciative audience. What did it mean, this wonderful music? Lucy asked herself. A world where it was good to be, in spite of care and sorrow. A world where, notwithstanding apparent discord, there was harmony. Spring, summer, autumn, winter, each was needed; youth, middle age, old age, these were mere incidents. Life was glorious, not only for the young with their opportunity all before them, but also for the others, yes, even for those who, like herself, had failed; for failure might be but the forerunner of a more spiritual success. She was glad to be alive, glad, in spite of her dull life and delicate health, glad that there were years and years before her.

Josephine played on, half unconscious of the quiet figure in the corner; her thoughts were on her own future.

The charm was suddenly broken by the ringing of a discordant bell.

"Dear me," said Lucy, "it is six o'clock! I had no idea it was so late. I must hurry home. My sisters expected me at five."

"My dear, you must stay and take tea with me. I'll send word to your sisters. A boarding-house supper is not the most entrancing thing in the world, but I'll get Mrs. Newhall to send ours up to us, and we'll have a cozy time in front of the fire."

She overbore all Lucy's objections, which indeed were but feebly stated, for what could be more enchanting than taking tea with Josephine? Their simple meal, consisting of milk-toast, cold mutton, stewed prunes and cake, tasted to Lucy like the nectar and ambrosia of the gods. Afterwards the two women drew their chairs up before the fire, and Josephine talked in her rapid, piquant fashion, while the firelight touched her animated face and shone on the red rose in her bodice.

"You will write to me?" Lucy begged.

"I don't know. I hate to write letters. My theory is that it is easy to pick up a friendship where you leave it off."

"But suppose we should not meet for years and years?"

"Oh, you must come and stay with me this winter. I only pay fifteen dollars a week. If my ship comes in I will ask you outright, but, unfortunately, my ship is the kind that is on the high seas most of the time."

Lucy did not wonder at this when she looked around the room at the profusion of rare things that

it must have cost so much to get together. Josephine's reckless manner of spending money was a continual surprise to Lucy. She did not like to own that fifteen dollars a week was a sum that would put a visit to Boston out of the question for her.

"I wish you had more to do," said Josephine suddenly. "When one is busy it doesn't matter who comes or goes."

"There is not much that I can do. Deborah is so strong and self-reliant, she manages the house, and she prefers to take almost the whole charge of the garden. It is foolish to care for things as I do. Flowers seem to me like friends, I love them so. I think if Deborah and Letitia only knew——" she paused. "All my life I have yielded," she went on presently. "It was easier to yield than to argue, but I have yielded with rebellion in my heart; now I mean to try to be more patient."

"For heaven's sake don't be any more patient," Josephine begged.

"If I had had a husband and children and a home of my own," Lucy continued, "perhaps I should have developed into the woman I was meant to be, but as it is—— It isn't Deborah's fault. She gives abundantly, and takes. Whether it is a child, or a kitten, or merely an occupation, she has to appropriate it with the intensity of a strong nature. As for

Letitia, she has always had an extremely high standard, and it is difficult to satisfy her."

"Poor child!" said Josephine. She suddenly put out her strong hand and crushed Lucy's thin one within it. Lucy put up her other hand to brush away her tears.

"I wish you had some vital interest in your life that would take the place my music does with me."

"I haven't the ghost of a talent."

"What you need is an occupation outside your own house. You are fond of flowers. Why don't you go into Mrs. Tucker's green-house? She says she wants an assistant."

The audacity of this proposal fairly took Lucy's breath away.

"Oh," she gasped, "we don't need money so much as that. I don't think you quite understand the way things are in a country town. Mrs. Tucker is a very nice person—we went to the public-school together—but she isn't a lady. I never heard of a lady going into a green-house."

"Didn't you? I have. Not that it makes any difference. Whatever the occupation is, if a lady does it, she is still a lady; and the more women of refinement take up such work the easier it will be for a vast number of others."

"I am sure my sisters would never consent."

"They would if you insisted, and if you suc-

ceeded 'they would be very proud of you and your rebellion would become a revolution. Your sisters would respect you more—yes, they would even love you more if you led your own life: and the money you earned would give them many luxuries, and you could come to Boston and stay with me. I see it all so clearly," she went on rapidly; "you have just the sort of taste that would make a new thing of Mrs. Tucker's green-house, and it would startle people so to have you do it." She gave a merry laugh. "Fancy the joy of stirring up a staid community like this! Lucy dear, you must do it if only to give me the pleasure of hearing what people will say."

It was half-past ten when Josephine and Mrs. Newhall's maid left Lucy at her own door. She was horrified at the lateness of the hour, but the time had slipped away without her realizing it. Her sister Deborah was sitting up for her.

"Letitia has gone to bed," she remarked, "but she has not been able to get to sleep. We were both worried about you. We expected you by nine o'clock at the latest. We could not imagine what had happened."

As she reached the top of the stairs a voice called out, "Come in here, Lucy. Why were you so late?" Miss Letitia demanded.

"I didn't know it was so late. I am very sorry."

"I was afraid something had happened to you on

the way home. I have never had an easy moment when you have been out at night since that man was knocked down. Really, Lucy, I am out of patience with you for being so heedless. Didn't it occur to you that Deborah and I might worry? It spoiled our whole evening. We had been looking forward to reading aloud, and we expected you by half-past eight."

Lucy spent a wakeful night. She was haunted insistently by Josephine's music. She felt as if it were calling to her to fear nothing, but, forgetting the past, to dare to face the future. What if Josephine were right, and if salvation lay, not along the old, monotonous track, not in learning to be more patient, less rebellious, but in having the courage to dig up the talents she had hitherto buried, and to go out into the world, strong in the sense of right and freedom?

As the result of three wakeful nights she made a visit late one afternoon to the green-house.

"I'm awful busy," Mrs. Tucker said. "There's a big wedding, a mechanic's daughter, Nellie Slocum, I don't suppose you know her folks, and I've got to make up a bokay of bride roses, and four pink bokays for the bridesmaids. I miss Ida at such times. Seems as though my fingers was all thumbs."

"Let me help you," said Lucy.

She took off her jacket and gloves and began to

arrange the bride's bouquet. The roses were half-open and their creamy whiteness was such a joy to her that she touched them lightly with her lips when Mrs. Tucker was not looking.

"You beautiful, beautiful things," she murmured, and she breathed a little prayer that the young bride might be very happy. "Go to her and tell her that life is a joy when we love," she thought, "and that no matter what happens she must be content to have found the best thing that life can give. And when sorrow comes, tell her when sorrow comes, that she must still remember she has had the best."

"Why, Lucy, how fine you've made 'em look—same as if you'd been brought up to the trade from your cradle. I've made my bunch kind o' scraggly. Ida always told me I made my bokays either too scraggly or too prim. Would you mind fixing mine a little? The bridegroom is coming for the white ones. The others I've got to send."

A little later an awkward young fellow came strolling in, looking as if he were very happy, but ashamed to have any one suspect the fact.

"Are the roses ready?" he asked, as if roses were foolishness, and he would be thankful when the day was over.

"Yes. I will get a box for you. Did you ever see more beautiful roses?" Lucy asked timidly.

"They are quite handsome," he admitted with seeming reluctance.

"You are going to be very happy," Lucy said shyly, "and there is just one piece of advice I want to give you." She felt as much detached from her usual self as if she were in another world. "Don't be afraid to show you are happy. Women never get tired of being told how much you care for them. It may be foolish, but they never do, and it saves so many heart-aches to say things straight out in plain words."

The young fellow looked at her in a half-startled way. "Do you know her?" he asked.

"No."

"Well, Lucy, I'm greatly obliged to you," said Mrs. Tucker. "I forgot to ask what you come for. Can I give you some more two-dollar 'Jacks'?"

"No, thank you. I came—" she hesitated. "I came, to ask if you thought—if you thought you would like to try me for a month as your assistant."

"You? For the land's sake, Lucy Wyatt, how did you ever get your folks to consent?"

"I haven't told them yet. I wanted to find out first if there was any chance of your taking me. I was afraid you would think me too old."

"I guess you are not any too old, Lucy Wyatt. You're so's you can get around."

"And then I am inexperienced."

"So you think you've got the faults of the old and the young too?"

"Yes. I find that is what it is to be middle-aged."

"Well, I look at it just the other way round. You are old enough when you are forty to have got some sense, and you're young enough to enjoy everything that's going. I find it a real pleasant time of life."

"Will you try me for a month?"

"I guess I will! I'll be thankful to get you."

"I ought to tell you I am very stupid at arithmetic. It would be hard for me to learn to keep your books."

"Anything more?"

"I am not strong. I shouldn't be able to work all day, so I shouldn't expect full wages. I haven't a bit of self-confidence, and perhaps——"

"That'll do. And the next time you are looking for a job I advise you to bring some reference beside your own. It sounds pretty risky," she added with a shake of her curly head. "But I'll try you for old acquaintance' sake. I'll expect you Monday morning."

Now that Lucy had resolved to take the fatal step she was seized with a hundred misgivings. That evening, while Letitia and Deborah took turns in reading aloud, she was outwardly present, but in-

wardly absent, traveling many roads that all returned in a circle to the point whence they started, namely, the stern admonition of her conscience, that it was less underhanded to tell her sisters her determination at once.

"It is time to go to bed," said Miss Deborah, as the clock struck half-past nine.

She closed her book and started to put out the lights.

"Deborah, don't be in such a hurry," remonstrated Miss Letitia. "I want to finish this leaf. I dislike to leave a piece of embroidery unfinished over Sunday when it is so nearly done."

"And I have some news to tell you," said Lucy in an unsteady voice.

"Some news? How exciting! Is it an engagement?"

"Oh, no. Not an engagement of marriage, at least. It is only an engagement of another sort I have made. I have promised——" she hesitated, then ran the words out in a tumultuous rush, "I have promised to help Maud Tucker in her greenhouse."

"Lucy Wyatt! Are you crazy?"

"Is it crazy to want to lead my own life? I am tired of doing nothing. I have never done any work in the world that counted. I love flowers, and I am sure that I can be a help to her. I am not

needed at home, and I should like a little more money."

For a moment there was an uncomfortable silence. Then Miss Letitia said with cold aloofness, "Is there anything we ever grudged you that you wanted? We may not have so much money as our neighbors, but we have always given you an even share of what we had."

"You have always been very generous."

"No woman in our family has ever been reduced to earning money," said Miss Letitia. "We have been ladies for generations."

"I am tired of being a lady. I want to be a woman."

"Lucy," said her sister Deborah, "you are altogether too delicate to do such hard work. The hot, damp air would be trying; you would take cold before a week was over."

"I have promised to try it for a month."

"You completely take my breath away," Miss Deborah continued. "It is Josephine's doing. You were very contented before she came."

"I have never been contented," said Lucy in a low voice. "I have been deceitful and kept my feelings to myself. It was easier than to give you pain, but all my life I have wanted things I did not have. When I was young, you——" she hesitated. It seemed cruel to go on.

"Whenever we gave you advice, it was for your good, as events proved," said Miss Letitia.

"I know you thought it for my good. Well, we won't talk about that; my youth is over, but I have a long life ahead of me, it is my life, no one can live it for me. I want to try my own experiments. I want to do a little honest work in the world."

"Lucy, it is absurd for you to imagine that you can begin to work at your age, when you have always led such a free life," said Miss Letitia. "It isn't as if you were twenty. You will find that you will dislike the confinement. And then just fancy how people will talk! Imagine what Mrs. Lutterworth will say."

"Let them talk. They may talk and I will be happy."

"I think you are unreasonable to want more than you have, dear," said Miss Deborah. "I am perfectly happy in my own home. What with the house and garden and Mr. Gray and Cowslip, and sewing and reading and calling on my neighbors, I don't think there is a happier person in Eppingham than I am."

"Because it is your work, Deborah, your work and your house, your garden, your cow and your cat. I want my work, my own work. I shall be happier and stronger if I have it."

"My house! My garden! My cow! My cat! ejaculated Miss Deborah.

"You do have a way of taking possession of everything, Deborah," assented Miss Letitia, as she handed her needle over to Lucy to thread.

"My cat!" the words rankled in Miss Deborah's mind. "Why, Lucy, you brought him home yourself."

Lucy got up to leave the room. "We won't talk any more about it to-night," she said wearily.

Miss Deborah detained her, however, by a fresh argument, and they threshed the matter out for half an hour.

"For heaven's sake let's go to bed," said Miss Letitia at last, as she took the final stitch in her embroidery, "I hate a discussion at this time of night. It keeps me awake for hours. You are a woman grown, Lucy, and if you insist upon doing an insane thing we have no right to prevent it."

"Of course I can give up, as I have done all my life, but if I do, knowing as I do now what is right, I shall never have a happy moment. I shall despise myself, and the Lord will despise me. It will be worse than selling my birthright."

Letitia left the room. Her tall figure was drawn up to its full height, and her face expressed cold disdain and an absolute lack of sympathy. Deborah, on the contrary, had been thrilled through and

through by Lucy's words. She had an admiration for pluck, joined to a natural curiosity to see what would happen if her sister carried out her plans.

"Lucy," she said, kissing her good-night more tenderly than usual, "try your experiment for a week, and if it doesn't succeed I think I can promise to have the self-restraint not to say, 'I told you so.'"

"It is just as I knew it would be," Miss Letitia said, when Lucy came home from the green-house at the end of three days with a bad cold. Miss Deborah said nothing. She shut her lips together very hard that she might not remind Letitia who it was who had predicted that Lucy would take cold.

Lucy was so wretched for two days that her sisters persuaded her to stay at home. Finally, on the third morning they called in Dr. Simonds.

"My sister took her cold in Mrs. Tucker's green-house," Miss Letitia informed him. "The air is so hot and damp that it is a great exposure."

Dr. Simonds was a man of few words. He took Lucy's temperature and found that it was normal; then he looked at her hard through his gold-bowed spectacles.

"Do you like to be in the green-house?" he asked her.

"I haven't enjoyed anything so much since I was a girl."

"Is this the first cold you've had for a long time?"

"Oh, no. I had one only a few weeks ago."

"Then it may not necessarily be the green-house that is responsible. Couldn't you wear something thin, a summer shirt-waist, for instance, while you are there, and then put on extra wraps when you come out into the cold?"

Lucy could not resist giving her sisters a triumphant glance.

"To tell the truth," said Miss Deborah, with that uncompromising honesty that endeared her to her friends, "Lucy came down in a shirt-waist the first morning she went to the green-house, and I made her go upstairs and change it for something thicker."

"Of course you did," said Miss Letitia, "and you were entirely right. The doctor has never realized how delicate Lucy is. When she is at home we can watch over her and make her take some sort of care of herself, but even with all our pains she is far from strong. I am sure, if she stays in the green-house she will break down from overwork."

Lucy glanced at the doctor with pleading eyes.

Something seemed to annoy him; he got up, and walked hastily to the window. Mr. Gray, in pursuit of a vanishing squirrel, caught his eye.

"Your cat has grown into a very fine animal, Miss Deborah," he said.

"He is Lucy's cat."

"Is he? You always seem to have the charge of him. By the way, just what is there for Miss Lucy to do at home?"

"There is always plenty of sewing," Miss Letitia replied after a little pause.

"Sewing!" the doctor gave a contemptuous grunt. "Excellent work, that, for an invalid!"

"There are all the little feminine occupations," said Miss Letitia. "It would take too long to specify them."

"Ladies," said the doctor vehemently, "I am as strong as the average man, but, upon my word! if I had to stay cooped up in the house and coddle myself whenever I caught cold, and sew for hours with nothing to occupy my mind except myself, I should either go raving crazy, or become a hypochondriac. Miss Lucy, I congratulate you that you have escaped. Congenial work is the salvation both of men and women. Go back to the green-house to-morrow morning. If you break down I will promise to attend you for nothing."

To have Dr. Simonds on her side was a triumph for Lucy Wyatt. When he went home to dinner that morning he said to his wife, "Clara, wouldn't you like a few plants? roses, carnations, lilies-of-the-valley and that sort of thing?"

"Lilies-of-the-valley in November? They would cost a small fortune. Andrew, have you gone crazy?"

"Frances will get them for me if you object," he said, tossing a five-dollar bill across the table to his daughter.

"But, Andrew, we can't spare the money. If you are so flush as all that I should like some new dotted muslin curtains in the spare-room, and you need a new hearth-rug in your office. You remember you let the sparks burn a hole in the one you have now; and we need two new hearth-brushes."

"I know what he wants, mother. He wants to help along Miss Lucy Wyatt."

"Charity begins at home," Mrs. Simonds quoted plaintively. "You never did care how the house looked, Andrew, but you are fond of Frances, and she needs a new hat. The one she is wearing is very shabby."

"Mother, I should be glad to wear my old hat three more winters if in that way I could make Miss Lucy's experiment a success. It isn't only Miss Lucy, it is the principle father and I care about. If she succeeds it will make it easier for all the rest of us."

"I think it is a dangerous thing," said Mrs. Simonds, conservatively, "if all of us women were

to rush into outside work, where would you men be?"

The doctor was about to speak, but checked himself. When one saw him in his own house it was easy to see why he had acquired the habit of silence.

It was not only Dr. Simonds who took Lucy's side, but also the minister and his wife. Mrs. Lutterworth, whose caustic tongue was dreaded throughout the parish, surprised the entire sewing-circle by standing up for Lucy Wyatt, and in the end, after a lively discussion, all the ladies followed her lead like a flock of submissive sheep.

Men, women and children went to Mrs. Tucker's green-house, partly from curiosity, partly from real kindness of feeling, and for a few weeks potted plants and cut-flowers were ordered so lavishly that Mrs. Tucker's slender stock was well-nigh depleted.

"I had no idea you was such a belle, Lucy," she informed her assistant.

"There are a great many good, kind people in the world," said Lucy, "but it won't last long. Very soon they will get used to my being here, and forget about me, and everything will be as usual."

"And then you'll get kind o' discouraged, and want to leave me."

"Leave you?" said Lucy. Her eyes were eloquent. "Leave the place where I am so happy!

Why, I love every flower in the green-house. If business falls off so you can't afford to pay me, I should be glad to stay on and pay you for keeping me."

When Lucy gave her sister Deborah the first money she had ever earned it was a proud moment.

Deborah took the crisp bills and smoothed them out gently. A mist came over her eyes. "Lucy, dear, you mustn't do it," she insisted. "You must keep all the money for your visit to Josephine. To think how I hectored and tormented you and tried to keep you from going into the green-house! And this is my reward! No, Lucy Wyatt, I can't take it!"

"Dear," said Lucy gently, "where should I be without you? I love you better than anyone in the world."

Mr. Gray, jealous because the two were absorbed in each other, made a spring and settled himself in Miss Deborah's lap. Lucy no longer minded his being more fond of her sister than he was of her. Her life was so full now that her old grievances seemed childish, and she could well afford to take the second place.

"Your cat is looking unusually handsome to-day," said Miss Deborah generously.

"I was just thinking how handsome your cat looked." Lucy returned with a smile.

Lucy handed the crisp bills back to her sister. "You must keep the money," she said. "It is our money. Everything I have belongs just as much to you and Letitia."

A TASTE OF FREEDOM

XI

A TASTE OF FREEDOM

SOME of Lucy Wyatt's friends predicted that she would tire of her occupation in the greenhouse as soon as the novelty was gone, while others believed that she would break down under the unaccustomed strain; it was so seldom that a woman succeeded who started on a new enterprise when she was past forty; but Lucy's case proved an exception. She flung herself into her work with the same enthusiasm with which she had given her heart to Josephine, and now that she had this double interest, life, which had so long been colorless and negative, grew absorbing. There was the constant expectation of receiving one of Josephine's racy letters, that were like a serial story, and only second in importance were the daily events in the greenhouse. There were always buds to watch unfold, tiny green buds that at first seemed so frail as hardly to justify hope, but that developed into fragrant roses, soft-hued orchids, or fifty other delightful

things. The roses were Lucy's favorites; she watched every stage of their progress, and when the petals fell she gathered them up tenderly and put them in a rose-jar, grateful for the fact that there were new buds to succeed the old blossoms. It was the law of the world, she told herself; men, like the flowers, were born, grew old, and died, and others came after them, but if they lived a true life there was always the beauty to remember. Now that she was happier herself, it was easier to believe in the justness of the laws.

On the rare intervals when Lucy received a letter from Josephine Letitia would ask if she said anything about the Boston visit.

"Not yet," Lucy had to own.

Finally Letitia said, "Lucy, it is the middle of February, and you may as well give up the idea of your visit. Miss Mason forgets her friends the moment they are out of sight. I knew it from the beginning. The very first time I saw Josephine Mason I thought her charming, but volatile."

"Letitia," said Lucy, with the slowly gathered courage of the last few months, "Josephine is my friend and I love her. If she never asks me to go to Boston I shall love her just as much."

Letitia could not but admire Lucy's loyalty, and to tell the whole truth she found her more interesting when she asserted herself.

The first week in March the invitation came that put Lucy Wyatt in a fever of excitement, which all her friends shared in a lesser degree. Mrs. Tucker's daughter offered to come home and help her mother the fortnight Lucy was away, so that the chief lion in her path was promptly slain.

"I am afraid I can't meet you," Josephine wrote, "as I have a music lesson to give at the hour you arrive, but you won't have any trouble, for you can take a subway car at the Union Station to Park Street, and walk over the hill to Chestnut Street, or if you prefer you can take a carriage."

"I must say Josephine is most inconsiderate," Miss Letitia said, when she read this note which Lucy relinquished very unwillingly. "My dear, you haven't been in Boston for years. You will be sure to lose your way if you take the electric cars. I positively forbid it."

"It is much safer to go with the public than to take a carriage," protested Miss Deborah. "Heaven only knows where the driver would land the child."

"I am a woman grown," Lucy reminded them gently. "I have a map of Boston, and also the power of speech."

"I want you to promise me to be very careful to wear enough wraps," said Miss Letitia. "An east wind may come up at any moment in Boston. You

must not leave off your furs, no matter how mild it is."

"Do go to see Bunker Hill," urged Miss Deborah.

The Lutterworths and Mrs. Simonds came to call the evening before Lucy's departure. Mrs. Simonds said she must be sure to call on Frances at the hospital, and she gave Lucy several errands to do. "Frances is so busy I don't like to ask her," she stated, "and then she isn't a born shopper, as you are."

Mr. Lutterworth told Lucy she must see the Fogg Museum in Cambridge and the Natural History rooms in Boston, while Mrs. Lutterworth said she must make Miss Mason take her to Keith's and the Castle Square Theatre. Indeed, if Lucy had done half her kind friends planned, the fortnight would have stretched itself into two months.

At last the moment for leaving home came, the flurry of packing was over, a feat that was rendered difficult owing to the contradictory advice Lucy received from her sisters, and she was actually in the Boston train.

"Be sure you don't lose your ticket," was Miss Deborah's parting injunction, while Miss Letitia added, "Be careful in the subway, or you will get knocked down."

Lucy had not dared to own to her sisters how little courage she had, but the dread of her solitary

transit through Boston kept her happy anticipations of her visit in abeyance. When she reached the Union Station the noise was deafening, and the mad succession of electric cars was so bewildering that she chose the more peaceful alternative of taking a carriage.

Upon arriving at Josephine's boarding-house Lucy explained to the maid who she was, and said she would like to go to her room to wait until Miss Mason came.

The girl led the way indifferently up three long flights of stairs. She had possessed herself of Lucy's handbag, and the driver followed with her trunk. The room was very small. There was no water in the bowl and pitcher, and there were no towels on the rack, while a heap of rubbish on the floor indicated that the last occupant had but recently departed.

"Can I have some water?" Lucy asked timidly.

"Yes'm. I didn't know you were coming so early. Miss Mason didn't say when she expected you, and it is the chambermaid's afternoon out."

"When does Miss Mason usually get home?"

"I don't know. There's so many coming and going I can't keep track of them all. She'll be sure to be in by dinner-time at half-past six."

It was only half-past four now, and Lucy's heart sank. The maid's indifference to the exits and

entrances of human beings struck a chill to the heart of the village-bred woman. In Eppingham, if she merely left home for an hour there were half a dozen people to whom the fact was of importance. Lucy had never felt so lonely in her whole life.

The maid cleared away the rubbish, and she presently returned with the pitcher filled with cold water. Lucy had not dared to ask for hot water. As the servant opened the door a gaunt maltese cat darted in ahead of her. This forlorn creature brought a ray of comfort with him.

"Pussy, dear pussy," Lucy said. "Come and see me. I have a cat at home. What is his name?"

"He hasn't got any that I know of. He's a tramp cat that is always coming and begging for food. Scat! We don't want you round here."

With the departure of the maid and the cat, Lucy felt as if her last tie to the world had gone. She unpacked her trunk with tears in her eyes. She would have given worlds to be back in dear Eppingham, sitting in the cozy parlor with Letitia and Deborah, receiving afternoon callers with Mr. Gray curled up in her lap. Dear Mr. Gray, what a pleasure it would be to see him! In this lonely city the very cats were unfriended. She was in a mood to bear cheerfully even the irritating advice of her sisters. There were some things in life sweeter than

independence. If Josephine had come to Eppingham, how eagerly she would have welcomed her! She would have put a bunch of red roses on her dressing-table at Mrs. Newhall's, and she would have met her at the train no matter what she had to give up. Not that she found fault with Josephine; she could not put off her music scholar; city customs were different—she merely blamed this great unfriendly Boston, with its lonely crowds of hurrying people.

“Well, Lucy,” said Josephine, coming hastily in at the partly open door, “I am sorry to be so late. You poor dear, I told Jenny to show you right to my room, but of course it was her afternoon out, and equally, of course, she forgot to mention the fact that you were coming, to Kate. How well you are looking! My dear, you look ten years younger. I like you in dark green. I thought I should get here soon after you did, but I was detained by meeting an old friend. I am sorry you have to be in this tiny room, but it is the only one that is vacant.”

Josephine had seated herself on the edge of the bed; there was but one chair, and Lucy was gazing with hungry eyes at her friend's animated face and brilliant color. She made up her mind that a fluffy fur boa and a black velvet hat with ostrich plumes made the most effective frame she had yet seen for the lovely face.

"I have planned all sorts of delightful things to do with you evenings," Josephine stated. "I only wish these old lessons didn't keep me so busy day-times. Somebody has given me two tickets for the Symphony concert to-night."

Lucy tried not to show how tired she felt. The concert would be a great pleasure, but she wished it had come an evening or two later. As soon as she went down into Josephine's room, however, she forgot her fatigue and her homesickness vanished. Lucy had again opened the volume containing her serial story and was once more in the enchanted atmosphere that had delighted her at Mrs. Newhall's. The same spirited sketches looked down at her from the walls, while the oriental rugs and hangings gave a touch of the Arabian Nights to the room; and best of all, there was Josephine's grand piano, silent now, but ready to wake into life at the touch of Josephine's hands. Lucy sat down on the window-seat, and was lost in happy thoughts as she looked across the house-tops to the Charles River glimmering in the distance. As twilight came, the lights sprang out one by one, until myriads of shining points succeeded the sunset glow. Lucy was absorbed by the thought of the rush and tumult of this large city. In Eppingham every light stood for some well-known household; here she was a stranger in a strange land; a stranger, but no longer unhappy,

because wrapped around with the light-hearted gaiety of Josephine's personality.

The first meal in the boarding-house was a trying ordeal to the shy, country-bred woman.

"Are there many people here?" Lucy asked nervously, as she paused in a sudden panic before the door of the brilliantly lighted dining-room.

"No, only about eight or ten. Tiresome people for the most part. I don't trouble myself about them. I talk a little at meal times, because it is so stupid to be silent, but otherwise I leave them severely alone. I will introduce you, because it is less awkward, but you needn't feel obliged to talk."

Lucy could not take her social obligations in this easy fashion. She had been brought up to consider conversation at meals obligatory, and greatly to Josephine's surprise, she found her friend entering into an animated talk with Miss Johnson, a gray-haired, shrinking person who sat next her at table. Opposite them were Mr. and Mrs. Cumberland. Mr. Cumberland looked bored and a trifle cynical. Mrs. Cumberland was vivacious enough for both of them. She was dressed in a low-necked black gown and wore a string of pearls.

"Is it whist to-night, Mrs. Cumberland?" Miss Johnson asked, with the hesitating manner of the woman to whom conversation is a duty rather than a pleasure.

"Yes, compass whist."

Lucy glanced at Mrs. Cumberland's husband and wondered whether it was the prospective whist-party that gave him that bored expression. If so, she could sympathize with him.

"Do you like whist, Mr. Cumberland?" she asked.

"I? Miss Wyatt, that is a superfluous question. It would not do any good if I did. I could never penetrate the charmed circle."

Lucy looked the surprise she felt.

"You see," he went on, "I have the misfortune to be handicapped at the outset. I belong to the wrong sex."

"But I thought the one advantage of whist was that men and women could play it together."

"Miss Wyatt, you have evidently not been long in this part of the world," he replied. "The great advantage of living in Boston is that there is nothing women cannot do better without men than with them."

"Miss Wyatt will think you are in earnest, Fred," Mrs. Cumberland said reproachfully.

"Miss Wyatt looks as if she were an intelligent woman. I have only to ask her to notice the engagements you make while she is here, and let her judge if I am not right. It is Symphony concert evening.

You could have gone there with me, if you had chosen."

"I have only missed four or five this winter, and you haven't been with me more than twice. Mr. Cumberland is not musical," she confided to them. "It bores him so to go to a classical concert that I always spare him, if possible. He could have gone to-night, but he wouldn't."

"Far be it from me to find fault with Mr. Cumberland's indifference to music, or Mrs. Cumberland's love of whist," said Josephine, "for it is to them that my friend and I owe the pleasure of going to the Symphony concert this evening."

"My friend and I!" How Lucy's heart warmed at the words.

"That poor Mr. Cumberland," said Lucy, as she and Josephine were starting for the concert. "I can't get his face out of my mind. And what is the matter with that blasé young fellow on my side of the table?"

"I am sure I don't know. I have never taken the slightest interest in any of them."

"Does Mrs. Cumberland go out much without her husband?"

"Of course she does. They care for such different things."

"I don't see what she married him for, then."

"You will wonder a great deal more what he

married her for, before you get through with them, but they seem to be happy enough as married people go. It is only their way of talking."

"But they can't really enjoy each other if they prefer to spend all their time apart," Lucy persisted.

"My dear, just think what a bore it must be to be tied down to one person continually. If I had a husband I am sure I should be thankful to have my evenings out."

"You know you don't mean that, Josephine. If I had a husband I should spend every single evening with him."

"I haven't the slightest doubt of that. You would be a household drudge if you had a husband. I am very glad you haven't one. I like you a great deal better as you are. If you had a husband you never would have left him to make me a visit."

"I like that little Miss Johnson," Lucy said, "although she looks as if she had been starved in her heart, poor thing. She has asked me to go with her to the Art Museum and Public Library to-morrow morning."

"Really? She is a mouse-like person generally. I never heard her say so much as she did to-night. You quite waked her up. If you find these people interesting, I don't know what you will say when you see my friends."

— They reached Symphony Hall a few minutes

later, and Lucy's eyes were dazzled by the glare of lights and the flash of brilliant colors. The cool white corridors and the pale cream-colored and gray walls with the line of red around the edge of the balconies, made a harmonious background for the gaily-dressed crowds. Lucy felt as if she were in a huge green-house full of living flowers. Red and different shades of lilac predominated, and she thought of scarlet geraniums and orchids. When the music began she was spell-bound. It was a concert to remember all her life. To hear Schubert's Symphony in C played by that great orchestra was an experience that was better than anything she had hoped for in this world.

"How could Mrs. Cumberland give up such a concert for whist?" she murmured in a pause between two movements.

"My dear, she has heard this Symphony until she is tired of it."

Mr. Cumberland was in the parlor waiting for his wife when they reached home. He came out into the entry to speak to them. "Well, what did you think of Symphony Hall?" he asked Lucy.

"I liked it extremely, and the music was more wonderful than anything I ever heard."

"Isn't she a satisfactory friend to have?" Josephine asked, and again Lucy had that warm feeling at the heart.

"You really seem to enjoy things," Mr. Cumberland said.

"How could any one help it? I was only sorry you and Mrs. Cumberland lost the pleasure."

"You needn't worry about us. So you liked Symphony Hall, and the organ did not make you think of an overgrown radiator?"

"I thought it very beautiful."

In the days to come Lucy had the intoxicating feeling that comes from being a social success. Why every one was kind to her she failed to see. She was not very young, she was no longer pretty, and neither was she clever, but the inexplicably delightful fact remained that everybody seemed to like her.

"Miss Wyatt is as refreshing as a breath of country air," Mr. Cumberland observed to Josephine, while his wife added that she was a sweet, sympathetic woman, and even the blasé young man spoke of her as a "nice sort." Josephine repeated every compliment to her visitor, sure that she had never suffered from over-praise. Miss Johnson, Lucy's gentle-faced neighbor at table, became her warm friend before the fortnight was over. The others confined their interest in her to telling her what she ought to see, while Miss Johnson helped her carry out their suggestions, and took excursions with her when Josephine was busy with her music

scholars. Lucy even went so far as to go up Bunker Hill monument, feeling as if this were a duty she owed to Deborah, while she visited the Fogg Museum in Cambridge out of consideration for Mr. Lutterworth. She hoped he would not be too much disappointed that she did not go to the Natural History rooms, but she had to leave out something.

"I never saw your equal, Lucy Wyatt," Josephine remarked one evening. "You will wear yourself out trying to please everybody. You've seen Bunker Hill, Faneuil Hall, the Art Museum, the Public Library, the Old South, Christ Church, all the burying grounds in Boston, to say nothing of the whole of Cambridge, and Frances Simonds's hospital. It is lucky for you that I am frivolous, so you have some let-up evenings."

It was those evenings that were the delight of Lucy's visit. She had them to look forward to during the long day when Josephine was busy, for, in spite of Lucy's indefatigable sight-seeing, she had periods of being homesick when her friend was occupied with her pupils.

The crowning joy of all came at the close of Lucy's stay in Boston, when she heard Tannhäuser with Ternina as *Elizabeth*. She had been to the opera only a few times in her life, and the prospect was exciting. Frances Simonds was to meet them at the Boston Theatre. She was enjoying her work,

but Lucy had the feeling that some of her illusions concerning life were gone. Frances was looking unusually well. Josephine had taken her cousin's clothes in hand, and the pale-lilac waist that she was wearing this evening was extremely becoming.

Lucy was intensely interested from the moment the curtain rose on the hill of Venus to the end of the opera. In spite of the sirens and nymphs, it was so wonderfully true to life. It was the old struggle between good and evil, the struggle as old as human souls themselves, and as true now as in the earliest ages. The pity of it struck her afresh. Alas! that no one ever learned from the experience of another, that every human soul must make a solitary journey through the world and fight with the evil powers alone! She thought of Alec, and of his struggle, and that soft, seductive music helped her to understand as she had never understood before the insidiousness of the temptations to yield to the lower nature.

They were in the family circle, and after the first act was over they went out into the corridor to get the air.

"Isn't the music wonderful?" Lucy asked Frances.

"I liked parts of it, but those nymphs looked too tailor-made."

As the opera went on, however, even Frances was thrilled and stirred, while Lucy was completely carried out of herself by Ternina's voice. Ah, if she herself had only been as strong as this wonderful Elizabeth, the sequel of Alec's history might have been different. But she had failed him instead of trying to help him. He had deserved friendship and loyalty at her hands, and she had let her own miserable pride stand in the way. How small such human distinctions looked in the face of death, or when one heard the interpretation of life that this marvelous opera gave! It was a comfort to Lucy when she thought of Alec to feel that the sin was on her side as well as his. Was Frances thinking of Mark Henderson? Did she, too, feel herself an Elizabeth with the fate of a human soul in her hands? Frances was watching the stage intently, but was she one who could ever learn through the imagination?

At the end of the second act, almost as if in response to Lucy's thoughts, Josephine said, "Why, there is Mr. Henderson, in the first gallery at the left, with the Barrets."

If Frances felt any excitement she did not show it. Lucy was the one who colored and seemed embarrassed. She looked in his direction, half apologetically, and saw him talking to a young and pretty girl. An elderly woman, who looked as if

she might have been pretty once in an ineffective way, sat with them.

Lucy did not know how the opera was going to end, and in the last act she fairly caught her breath. Was the evil in Tannhäuser going to triumph over the good after all? She felt she could not bear that. No, the good would prevail at last. The Pilgrims' chorus thrilled her through and through and seemed an epitome of the glorious possibilities in life. It was only when Tannhäuser was saved after *Elizabeth's* death that she remembered to turn to her companions.

"There is no need to ask if you enjoyed the opera, Lucy," Josephine said.

But enjoyment was hardly the right term for the fever of excitement in which Lucy had spent the evening. It was as if there had been crowded into that brief space a complete revelation of life and human nature, its baseness and sin, together with its wonderful power of rising to a nobler level.

As they were going out of the lower hall they met Mark Henderson. He and his friends were lingering to look at a photograph of Melba. Lucy would have passed him by, but Josephine stopped to speak to the group.

"Wasn't the opera great?" she asked.

"Yes."

He turned and saw the other two. When his

eyes rested on Frances his sensitive face changed. Lucy glanced furtively from one girl to the other. Miss Barrett was exceedingly pretty, but Lucy thought she looked as characterless as a rose without fragrance. Frances, on the other hand, suggested to her a purple thistle. She was plain, but there was something infinitely satisfactory in her clear-cut, irregular features, and the flash of her gray eyes. Life would not be wholly smooth with her for a companion, but it would never be dull; there would be constant surprises full of piquant interest.

"Did you enjoy the opera, Miss Barrett?" Josephine inquired, at the same moment that Mr. Henderson was asking Frances a similar question.

"I thought it lovely, splendid," Miss Barrett replied with enthusiasm.

"I liked it," said Frances, impartially, "but Wagner and I are not entirely congenial. This is the third opera of his I have heard. They make me think of life in a country town. There is so much that is monotonous, and then once in a while there are glorious half hours."

"That idea of life does not apply only to a country town," Mark said.

He looked tired and listless. Lucy was sure he was living in an unsatisfactory tract of country at present. Had she been Frances, she would, on the

spot, have given up all thoughts of finishing her hospital course, and would have said some little thing to make him feel that the glorious half hours might come again, but Frances was always herself, and instead of striking the personal note, she said it was a pity *prima donnas* were invariably so stout, and then turned to join Lucy. Josephine had walked on ahead with Mrs. Barrett.

"I don't see what you mean by calling that opera monotonous," Lucy said to Frances. "To me it was intense from beginning to end."

"You are more musical than I am, and you demand less. Just the unfolding of buds in a greenhouse is an event to you. You must remember I am fresh from a great hospital where I have learned——", she paused,—“that opera, the most thrilling parts of it, seem tame compared with the horrors of real life.”

"Do you ever wish you hadn't gone there?" Lucy asked impulsively.

"Never. I am sometimes cowardly enough to wish I hadn't been made so I wanted to go, but if there is so much more sin and sorrow in life than I supposed, then there is all the more need of what I can do to help."

There was a long pause. Then Lucy said, "Mr. Henderson did not look happy to-night. Oh, Frances, dear, how I wish you could find it in your

heart to be good to him. If there were more happiness in the world, there would be less evil."

"That was a pretty girl who was with him," Frances returned, with an assumed indifference, "she looked good as gold."

"Yes, but as insipid as sugar and water."

Lucy's visit was at an end, and every one in the boarding-house was sorry to have her go. Poor Miss Johnson was in tears as she bade her good-by.

"My dear," she said "you have brought great brightness into the life of a dull old woman. When I think of all we have seen together, and of your sunny young face and power of enjoyment I am very thankful to have known you. Would it be too much to ask you to spare a few minutes from your full life now and then to write to me?"

And Lucy, remembering how carelessly Josephine had once answered a similar question, replied with warmth, "Dear Miss Johnson, of course I will write to you. It is such a pleasure to have made a new friend."

It seemed hard to Lucy that she should love Josephine with a wealth of passionate affection, only to receive a small portion of regard in return, and that she could not give as much love to Miss Johnson as that dear friend was bestowing on her, but the fact that she too, on her side, could inspire a deep

love was so novel as to be strangely comforting. She was determined never by word or deed to fail in doing her duty by her new friend. Yes, life was good, far better than she had supposed it could be in the old days; it was stimulating and exciting, this life in the great city, but she would not like it as a constancy. At the end of the fortnight she was glad to go back to peaceful Eppingham, and have time to think it all over.

The Cumberlands seemed very sorry to say good-bye to Lucy. They interested her deeply and she felt profound sympathy for them. She had never seen two people who seemed less congenial. They had been in love with each other once, she was sure of that from something Mrs. Cumberland said to her one day, but they had been profoundly disillusioned. Was there no one who found real happiness? Lucy thought of John and Esther, and their contentment with life and each other warmed her to the heart's core. Yes, there were a few happy people who kept alive one's faith in the best things, and if, on every side, there were men and women who had failed, there was always the wider vision of life, that she had found, opening out for them if they would but see it, for it was good to live in spite of sorrow, pain, and disappointment, since there were love and friendship in the world. She no longer felt a sense of bitterness because she had missed the best in life;

it was so much to have escaped the worst.

It was a cold, crisp night when Lucy reached home, but a flaming sunset gave a look of warmth and cheer to the snowy roads, for although it was early spring in Boston, it was still winter in Eppingham. The very air breathed of purity. It had been good to go away, but it was better still to come back, and it was best of all to be greeted by Deborah's tempestuous embrace at the station, and Letitia's quiet kiss when she reached home. They were so glad to see her! Even Mr. Gray shared in the general demonstration, and rubbed himself lovingly against her feet.

There was a fire on the hearth in Lucy's bedroom, and there was warm water in her pitcher, and a great bunch of pink carnations on her dressing-table. It was very sweet to Lucy to be wrapped about with all these signs of love, and she turned and kissed Deborah anew as she said, "Oh, it is so good to get home."

"You were exceedingly faithful about writing," said Letitia. "I am glad you saw so much."

"We have felt so old and dull without you, dear," said Deborah. "I don't believe you half realize the freshness your young life brings into the house. I am glad you went, though, because it is good for young people to have their fling."

THE END.

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